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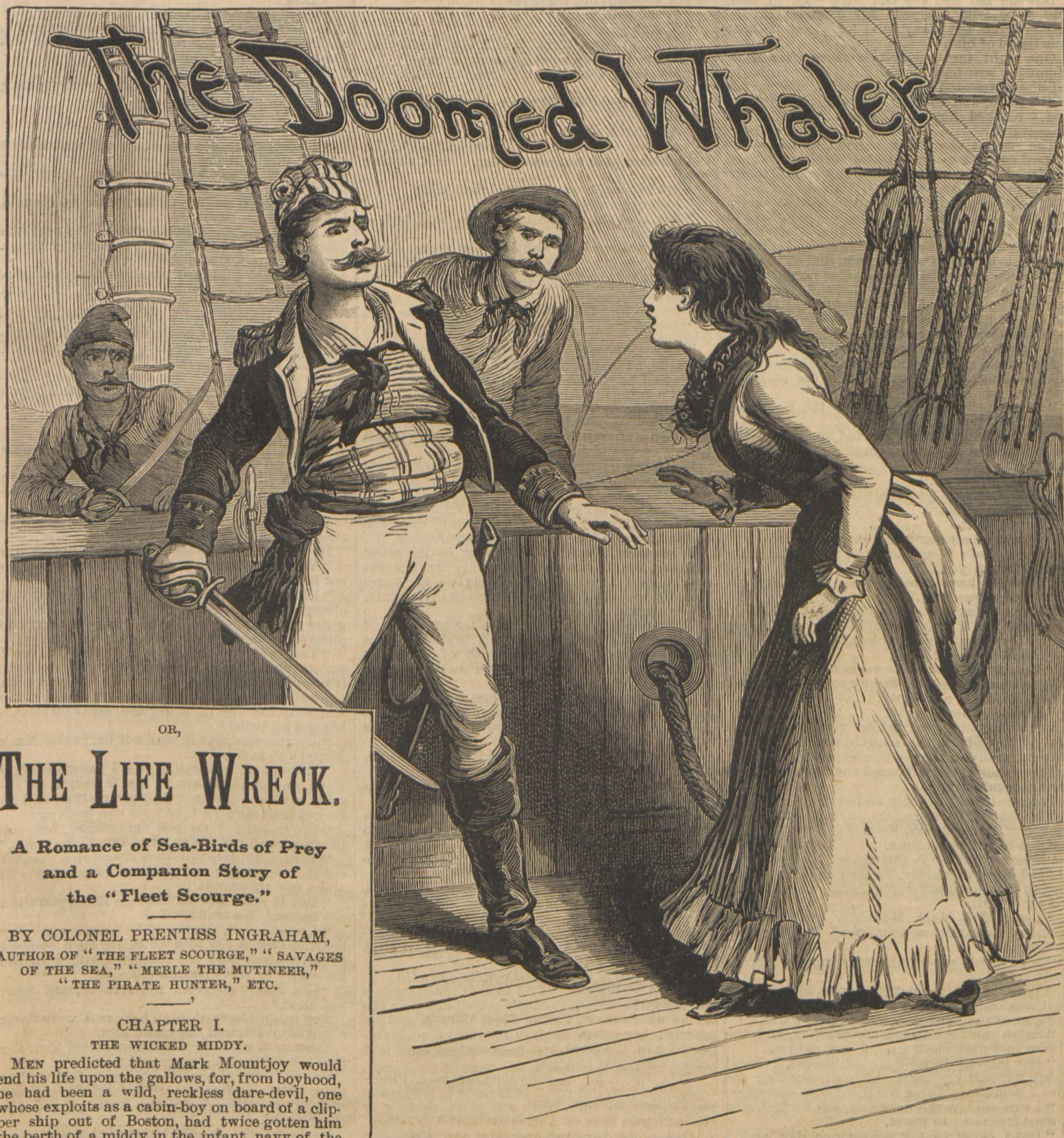
No. 546.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., April 10, 1889.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. XLII.



OR,

THE LIFE WRECK.

A Romance of Sea-Birds of Prey
and a Companion Story of
the "Fleet Scourge."

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE FLEET SCOURGE," "SAVAGES
OF THE SEA," "MERLE THE MUTINEER,"
"THE PIRATE HUNTER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE WICKED MIDDY.

MEN predicted that Mark Mountjoy would end his life upon the gallows, for, from boyhood, he had been a wild, reckless dare-devil, one whose exploits as a cabin-boy on board of a clipper ship out of Boston, had twice gotten him the berth of a midddy in the infant navy of the United States, and whose love of mischief had each time gotten him dismissed the service.

The son of a worthy clergyman dwelling in a

A SPLENDID-LOOKING MAN, CUTLASS IN HAND, LEAPED ON BOARD, TO SUDDENLY
START BACK AS THERE CAME FROM THE LIPS OF ALMA SHIELDS:
"CAPTAIN MOUNTJOY! AND A PIRATE!"

village near Boston, he had been the terror of the parish, and, after one of his escapades, had run off and gone to sea.

The next heard of him by his distressed parents, was when he walked into the family pew one Sabbath afternoon wearing the uniform of an American midshipman, and he bore letters with him to show that he had saved the life of a naval officer by killing a pirate on his own deck, and thus won his place deservedly.

There was hope then for Mark Mountjoy, and the heart of his girl sweetheart, pretty Lola La Salle, one of Deacon La Salle's twin daughters, beat high with hope, for, since she could remember, she had loved the little dare-devil lad.

And his father and mother had hope too that he would change; but no, for Mark horrified the villagers before he had been home two weeks by his wild acts, and he was forced to go to sea to escape going to jail, when soon after news came that he had been dismissed from the service for playing jokes on the commodore.

Again he became a cabin-boy, and on a vessel-of-war, and one night when off a port in Algiers he deserted, swam ashore, turned Mahomedan, joined an Algerine corsair, learned where its rendezvous was and the American and other captives held there, and swimming out to his old vessel, when she again came off-shore, gave the information he had obtained.

Under his guidance the rendezvous was surprised by night, the Algerines severely punished and the captives released, and the daring cabin-boy became once more Midshipman Mark Mountjoy.

But the lad had the Old Nick born in him, and some wild escapade again caused his dismissal from the navy, and for years nothing was heard of him.

One night, just twenty-two years after Mark Mountjoy was born, in the little rectory on the hillside, a vessel dropped anchor off the harbor of the town, and a boat containing two oarsmen and a cloaked form in the stern-sheets, rowed shoreward.

The one at the tiller seemed to know the waters well, for he guided his boat to a point not far from the church where the Reverend Mountjoy had been pastor for nearly twenty years.

The cloaked individual sprung ashore, said a few words to the oarsmen in a low tone and walked toward the rectory, which was not far from the church.

A light burned in one room, and as the curtains were drawn back the visitor beheld a person seated within, a book in his hand.

"Who can he be?" he muttered, and then he let fall the heavy brass knocker on the door.

The one who was reading laid aside his book and came to the hall-door himself.

He beheld a tall, dark-faced, handsome man, with flashing, fearless eyes and in the attire of a sailor.

"Pardon, sir, but I would see the Reverend Mountjoy," he said.

The one he addressed started, gazed at the visitor, and said politely, yet in an embarrassed way:

"Come in, please."

He led the way into the library and turning motioned to a chair.

Then he said:

"You are a stranger in these parts, sir?"

"No, I know them well; but I have been absent for seven years."

"Changes have come in those years, sir, for I am rector here now."

"And my father?" quickly asked the visitor.

"Alas! sir, if Mr. Mountjoy was your father, he lies over yonder in the churchyard."

"Dead! my God! dead!"

"Yes, sir, he died three years ago."

The stranger seemed deeply moved, and then asked, almost in a whisper:

"And—my mother, sir?"

"She died one year before your father, and lies by his side in the churchyard," and there was sympathy in the young clergyman's tone.

The visitor arose and paced the room in silence for a few minutes.

Then he turned quickly and said:

"I need hardly introduce myself, sir, having spoken of Mr. and Mrs. Mountjoy as my parents, for you have heard of me."

"There are those in this village have told you of Mad Mark Mountjoy, as they called me, and maybe they have not exaggerated much. I guess I deserved all."

"I am Mad Mark Mountjoy, sir, and I was born in this house, in that room opening into this one."

"My parents are dead, and I suppose I broke their hearts."

"Well, it was predicted of me, with all else that was bad, even that I would die on the gallows, or at the yard-arm, and maybe I will."

"Satan was born in me, my dear sir, and the cloven foot must show itself in my nature."

"But I loved those dear old people, I loved them with all my heart and soul, dividing the love I held in my being for them with one other."

"I was wild, reckless, erring, yes wicked, and I went from bad to worst."

"But I came to my senses one day, and I turned over a new leaf, and I determined to lead a different life."

"I did so, and after seven years I have come back, owner of my own vessel and a changed man."

"I have come back to find them dead, dead and believing me all that was bad."

"I have talked to you, sir, because you hold my father's place. You are a clergyman, and this dear old home is your home now."

"Left my parents no word for me, sir?"

"None, that I ever heard."

"They died unforgiving then, for the misery I had caused them?"

"They were Christians, they were your parents, and so, in their hearts must have forgiven you."

"Thank you for those words—that comfort at least."

"Here, sir, I meant this for them, and I give it to you and ask you to erect over them a monument worthy of them with half of it, and the balance give to the poor of your parish," and unbuckling a belt heavy with gold from about his waist, Mark Mountjoy threw it upon the table before the young clergyman.

"You will do this for me, sir?"

"I will sacredly perform the duty, Mr. Mountjoy."

"I believe you; but there is one question I would ask you?"

"As many as you please, sir."

"There was a wealthy merchant here in those days of my boyhood—Deacon La Salle."

"Where is he?"

"He has moved to Boston, sir, and gone into business there."

"And—his family?"

"Went with him."

"Thank you."

"His two daughters, you know, are twins, Ethel and Lola, and one is married, and—"

"My God! which one?" cried the sailor excitedly.

"Ethel; she is Mrs. Monte, her husband being a naval officer."

"Ah! thank you."

"And she is dwelling here now, in the old La Salle homestead, while her sister, Lola is visiting her."

Mark Mountjoy started, and then said:

"I thank you, sir, many times."

"We may meet again, will do so, I hope—good-night."

He turned abruptly and left the room, seemingly deeply moved by some thought brought up by the words of the clergyman.

CHAPTER II.

TOO LATE.

"THE CEDARS" was the old home of Henri La Salle, a rich merchant whose father, a French noble had been driven an exile from France, and found a refuge in America.

The son became a shipping merchant, and made money, and he was happy in his home, his wife and two children, twin daughters, Ethel and Lola.

It was the latter that had been the "sweetheart" of mad Mark Mountjoy, and through all he had been her beau ideal, "boy hero."

He had been her champion at the village school, and the little miss was never known to care for others than the handsome young scapegrace.

When he at last left home, going no one knew whither, she did not forget him, always defended him, and it pained her deeply as the years went by to feel that he had forgotten his parents, his home and her.

Merchant La Salle, for the better education of his beautiful daughters, sold out his business in the little seaport, after the death of his loved friend, Reverend Mountjoy, and went to Boston to dwell.

Years passed on and Ethel, one of the sisters, married a distinguished young naval officer, Captain Roland Monte, and went to dwell in the old home, "The Cedars."

Though suitors flocked about her by the score, Lola refused all offers.

She was true to her first and only love for the roving scapegrace, Mark Mountjoy.

Beautiful in face, exquisitely graceful in form, well-educated and accomplished, possessed of a lovely disposition, added to the fact that she was an heiress, Lola La Salle was a belle, acknowledged by men and women alike.

But every suitor she gave the same reply to, until at last rumor had it that she was engaged.

After her engagement, which was an acknowledged fact, she went down to visit her sister at The Cedars.

She wished a few weeks' respite, she said.

But in reality she wished to visit the old scenes of her girlhood, see the little school-house on the ridge where she had gone when Mark Mountjoy carried her books to and fro from school, and wander in the lanes and woods where they had often wandered together.

This dreaming of a bygone love would indicate that Lola did not love the one to whom she was betrothed, that there was more pleasure in the sad past than in anticipation of the future.

One night her brother-in-law and sister had gone to an entertainment in the town, and she had remained at home.

Why, she did not know, but something impelled her to do so.

It was a perfect moonlight night, and the air, though cool, was not unpleasantly so.

Throwing a wrap about her, she walked out upon the broad piazza of The Cedars.

The harbor lay before her, with the sea beyond, and the sullen roar of the surf came to her ears.

The lights of the town half a mile away looked like myriads of fire-flies, and the cross on the spire of the little church stood out in bold relief as if on fire, lit up by the moon's light.

The tombstones glimmered white and spectral in the vale, as she gazed down upon the churchyard, and the harbor was dotted with many vessels at anchor.

Not far off, anchored far away from the other vessels, she beheld a schooner, and the wonder came to her why it was there.

The scene was one of beauty, of quietude unbroken, and it soothed her heartache, for she had indeed a fit of the blues on that evening, as within just one week she was to become a bride.

Suddenly she saw a form coming up the walk toward the mansion.

It was a tall form, a cloak over the shoulders, and the step was quick and firm.

A visitor to her brother-in-law, she supposed, some brother officer in the navy doubtless.

But no, another moment, and the stranger had reached the piazza, and the moonlight revealed the two.

"Mark!"

"Lola!"

He had uttered the name with a glad cry.

He had opened his arms as he spoke her name, and with a bound she reached his side and was clasped to his broad breast.

For a moment neither spoke.

Then suddenly, with a startled cry, she sprung away from him, crying:

"Oh, Mark, what have I done?"

"But I was so glad to see you."

"I knew you were not dead, not a pirate, as people would make me believe—but oh! you stayed away so long—too long, alas! too long!"

The touching sadness of her last words caused him to quickly say:

"Lola, I remained away until I had cast the past behind me, until I had won a vessel and a means of support, and then I came."

"But, alas! I find my parents dead, died of a broken heart, I am told, for my wayward career."

"The old home has another owner now, my parents sleep yonder in the churchyard; but before I went to their graves I came to you, for I was told you were here."

"I came to tell you that I have never forgotten you, have always loved you, and to ask you to be my wife."

"Alas! you come too late!"

"Too late! What do you mean?"

"Mark, I love you, and the way I just now sprung into your arms proves it."

"I came down here to dream of our past, to think of you, the last week I have to myself, for I tell you, Mark, I am engaged to another."

The strong man staggered under her words as though struck a severe blow.

He said, in a voice low, hoarse and quivering:

"You have broken your vows then, you have not been true to me, Lola?"

"I have been true, for I still love you, will always love you; but my father was on the verge of financial ruin, and there was but one piece of property that was not mortgaged."

"That was myself, and it had to go too, for I was taken in lieu of so much gold, and one week from to-night I marry Peter Rutledge, a man older than my father, a miser, they say, and one who lives the life of a recluse, but who is rich beyond all belief."

"By Heaven! but it shall not be!" cried Mark Mountjoy, savagely.

"It must be, it shall be, for I have given my word, and unless I keep it my father, in his despair, will end his own life, my mother will be turned into the street, and we will be beggars."

"For myself I do not care, Mark, but my parents shall not suffer when I can save them."

"Would to Heaven that I was rich, that I could help them; but I have only my vessel and a few thousands."

"But it shall not be, Lola La Salle, you shall not become this man's wife."

"I will do so, Mark, if it breaks my very heart, destroys my soul even, for I am pledged to my father and my mother, pledged by the holiest of vows, to become his wife."

"Go, Mark, go from me forever, and now, yes, now."

She sprung toward him, her arms were flung about his neck, and she kissed him.

Then with a strength that surprised him, she tore herself from his arms and fled.

For an instant he seemed about to follow; but then, with a deep imprecation turned away and walked rapidly down the vale toward the churchyard.

He knew the family burying-plot well, and paused there with uncovered head as he stood by the graves of his dead parents.

Then he turned away with something strangely like an oath upon his lips, and said savagely:

"The past is buried, the future lies before me and recklessly I cast myself on the tide, let it bear me where it will."

Swiftly he strode back to the shore, sprung into his waiting boat and half an hour after his beautiful schooner was flying seaward to go whither a cruel fate led her daring master.

CHAPTER III.

WITH DYING LIPS ACCUSED.

In what the townspeople called "The Miser's Den" a one-time handsome old stone mansion, surrounded by large grounds, overgrown with trees and weeds, and at the time it is presented to the reader, an old rookery, a woman sat in a room whose comforts compared strangely with the desolation and neglect without.

The room was large, almost luxuriously furnished, and opened into another that was its counterpart in size and furniture.

A handsome lamp upon the table gave a cheerful glow to the room, and a fire burning brightly upon the spacious hearth added heat, for the night was dark, chilly and blustering, with driving rain and sleet.

The one who occupied the room was Lola La Salle, that was, but married to a man who was three-score years, a despicable creature people said, and known as Old Miser Pete Rutledge.

His wealth was as unbounded as his meanness, gossip said, and his young and beautiful wife was known to none among the people into whose midst he had brought her.

In the old home, tumble-down without, but comfortable within the rooms they occupied, they dwelt, some said the young wife leading a life of utter wretchedness.

Two old servants, in an out-house near, were their only help, and day and night Lola passed her days in this place which people said was a living tomb.

Beautiful as ever, her form more graceful in the four years since she parted from Mark Mountjoy that night on the piazza of her old home, Lola Rutledge was pacing to and fro in her room, her handsome dress clinging gracefully about her slender figure, and the train sweeping far behind her.

Even in that place she was wont to dress up every evening to please her old husband, for she was a true wife.

Her face had upon it a look of dreamy sadness, as though her aching heart looked out through mists of tears in her beautiful eyes.

She had been reading a book, but had thrown it aside as the storm grew wilder, and began to walk to and fro, her thoughts busy, as they ever were with the past.

Suddenly she stopped in her walk and listened.

Then she opened the door and heard a loud rap, as though upon the front door of the mansion.

"Strange, who can it be coming here?" she murmured, as though it was strange indeed for any one to visit there.

She heard a door open, on the floor below, a step in the hall and a voice asked:

"Who is there?"

"A gentleman to see Mr. Rutledge on business of importance," came the reply from without.

A key turned in the lock, some one was admitted, and she heard the door of her husband's library close.

Then she closed her own door and entering the room adjoining her own glanced over toward a bed in one corner.

She glided toward it and stood looking upon its occupants.

One was a lovely-haired boy of three, handsome and innocent in childhood.

The other was a golden-curbed baby-girl of one year, and the two were fast asleep, little dreaming of what the world held in store for them, and how blessed a thing it is that we know nothing of the future, for what misery would be ours could we but see what is before us.

"My darlings!" she said, almost passionately, and dropping down upon her knees by the bed, she cast her loving arms over them, as though to shield them from some dreaded ill that hovered above their sleeping forms.

And thus she remained, as though asleep upon her knees, until a wild cry for help rung through the house, and came from her husband's sitting-room, the one into which the strange visitor had been ushered.

The knock that had aroused Lola above-stairs had startled old Peter Rutledge, as he sat in his easy-chair before a blazing fire, looking over his accounts, as it was his constant pleasure to do.

He was a man with an intelligent face, cunning withal, but not unkindly.

He dressed neatly, in black, which gave him a clerical appearance, and altogether was not an unprepossessing man.

He had neared three-score years, and looked even older, and yet those would say who observed him that he was not an unhappy man.

He had bargained for his wife, bought her in fact from her father, and with her parents dead, her sister far away, he endeavored in his

own way to make her happy, to prevent her from regretting that she had been sold to him.

Such was Peter Rutledge, the man whom Lola had married, and who, bound to him, had made the best of life, being ever devoted in her duties, and regarding him with respect and kindly feeling, in spite of what the world said.

But the world is wrong in its surmises nine times out of ten, and "Madam Rumor" is a most unconscionable liar, for she builds seeming facts upon shadows.

Peter Rutledge was evidently surprised at the knock on his front door, for they never had visitors, and night was no time for a business call.

He went to the door, opened it and admitted a man who was a stranger to him.

"Well, sir, pray say why you have called?" he said, when the two entered the library, and he turned toward the stranger, a man of fine physique, dark, stern face, restless eyes, and the look of a sailor.

"I am here, sir, to demand of you, in the name of the son you drove from your doors, the sum of ten thousand dollars, which he sadly needs. You are rich, and just now luck is against him, and he is in great want of the money."

"You have it, I know, for I came well informed. You keep your gold here in your house, I also know," said the sailor, boldly, as he drew a jeweled stiletto from beneath his cloak, as though to enforce his words, for the miser thrust his hand in his bosom.

Peter Rutledge loved his beautiful wife in his way, idolized his children, but his gold was his god, and to take it would be like unto taking a drop of his life's blood with every gold piece.

Driven to desperation by the cool demand of the stranger, for a son he had long hoped was dead, he stood at bay, slowly moving backward his desk, where he kept a weapon.

"Who are you?" he asked, hoarsely, to gain time.

"I am a sea rover, sir."

"A pirate?"

"Yes, sir, if so you will, and just now playing the pirate ashore on your treasure, for I must have what I demand."

"Come, out with your gold, old man!—ten thousand dollars, no more, no less, for that is the sum your son asked for and the sum I will have for him. Obey me, and lose no time!"

As the daring freebooter uttered the last word, the miser had reached his desk, and thrusting his hand into a drawer he drew out a pistol, and with a cry of exultation, he leveled the weapon at the freebooter and pulled the trigger. But, the powder flashed in the pan,* and, with a spring, the pirate was upon the miser.

There was a cry for help from the old man, a savage oath from the freebooter as he drove his sharp blade into the breast of his victim.

"My God! Mark Mountjoy, you have killed my husband!"

The sailor turned at the words:

"Lola! Good God!"

The words burst from the lips of Mad Mark, and, as he uttered them, he turned and fled from the room.

Her eyes fell upon the stiletto, and seizing it for an instant she seemed as though about to fly after him, then she turned and knelt by the side of her husband.

"You know him, Lola?" gasped the man, over whose face the hue of death was stealing.

Ere she could answer, the door was thrown open and two men sprung into the room.

"Who did this deed?" exclaimed one of the men, and he gazed suspiciously at Lola, who held the knife of the freebooter in her hand.

"She can tell you," said the miser, and they were his last words, for he fell back dead, and Lola, his beautiful wife, stood accused of murder, accused of the deed of Mad Mark Mountjoy, her lover!

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNKNOWN HERO.

THE season of gay festivities was at its height in the grand old city of New Orleans, and all the town was on pleasure bent.

Music, laughter and joyous voices filled the air, commingling pleasantly together, and the city was ablaze with light in honor of Mardi Gras, for with the ending of the reign of this King of Pleasure, the sackcloth and ashes of Lent must be put on, so until that time of repentance, "let the heart be unconfined," was the motto of all the young people of the ever gay metropolis of the Mexican Gulf.

A masked ball was given that night at the governor's mansion,† and therein had gathered the "beauty and the chivalry" of the land of the cotton and the cane.

The mansion was a very large one, surrounded by extensive ornamental grounds, filled with cozy bowers and arbors, and all surrounded by a massive wall.

The beauty of the night had tempted some of the masqueraders into the grounds, but as the

* Flint-lock firearms were used at the time of which I write.

† New Orleans was then under a governor.

supper hour drew near they had entered the mansion, and the bowers and arbors were deserted.

Within, all was grandeur, music and enjoyment, and the scene was a gorgeous one, for the grand old mansion had spread wide its doors for the entertainment, and the maskers were dancing, flirting and promenading at will.

One beautiful lady, dressed as a Greek maiden, was fairly haunted by admirers, and it was guessed that they knew who she was, that she was the daughter of a wealthy planter, dwelling on the Mississippi above the city, and who was said to be worth millions.

Suddenly a servant came up to her and placed in her hand a note.

All saw her start as she read it, but the expression upon her face was not visible, so securely was every feature masked.

"You must pardon me, gentlemen, for awhile," she said, and declining all offers of an escort, she glided away and disappeared in another room.

Once free of those about her, she escaped others who sought to join her, and made her way alone into the gardens.

There she paused, and by a lantern swinging in a tree, again read the note which the servant had handed to her.

It read:

"Come to the south gate. Let no one see you. Don't fail. LEO."

"Ah, me! some new trouble I fear, for he only calls on me to aid him now."

"But I can do nothing," she murmured to herself.

Yet, even with this decision, she went on her way and soon reached an arbor that stood at the further wall of the garden.

There was a massive gate there, set in the wall, and near it stood a man wearing a cloak.

"Leo, is that you?" she asked, as she drew near.

"Your brother Leo, mademoiselle, is not very well, so awaits you in a carriage at the curb."

"I will conduct you to him," said the man, politely.

She hesitated an instant, and then, as the gate was thrown open, she stepped out upon the pavement, where a carriage stood against the curb.

The door of the vehicle was open, and leaning into it, the maiden said:

"Brother Leo, I am here."

She was grasped by strong arms from within, and dragged into the vehicle, while the words came in a stern voice:

"Quick! close the door and jump up with the driver!"

But the maiden gave one loud cry for help, and it was heard by a horseman who was just then passing, and he spurred in front of the horses and seized their bridles.

There was a shot from the man on the box with the driver, a return shot from the horseman, a fall, and the horses were guided into a tree and checked.

"Hold your horses there, or I shall kill you!" came the stern command to the driver, and the horseman sprung to the ground to confront the one who had leaped out of the carriage.

It was quick work. One man fell dead, just as the maiden bounded out of the carriage.

"You are safe, lady, so have no fear," said the horseman, and he added:

"You seem to have come from within those grounds, so pray send for help."

She uttered a few earnest words of thanks and ran into the garden, to soon return with several gentlemen, who discovered that the horseman was master of the situation, for the two kidnappers were dead and the driver was a prisoner.

But the rescuer disappeared quickly, and who he was no one knew.

The next day the papers told the story of the kidnapping of the beautiful heiress, Alma Shields, and her rescue by an unknown horseman.

All knew how Planter Shields had two children, a son and daughter, and that Leo, the son, had thrown himself away and gone utterly to the bad; but it was shown that he was not guilty of the attempt to carry off his sister, his name being used by the kidnappers to lure her into their power, and the one who had attempted the daring deed proving to be a discarded lover of Alma's, who had run through his fortune by wildest dissipation.

One day, a week after, Alma was with her father and came suddenly upon the brave rescuer.

"Oh, sir, you need not attempt to shun us, for I know you."

"Father, this is the gentleman who saved me from Paul Ravenna."

The one whose hand she grasped was a tall, splendid-looking man, with a dark, stern face, and the appearance of a sailor.

"I am fairly caught, Miss Shields, for so I see by the papers is your name; but I cared not to be known, so kept quiet."

"Allow me to introduce myself as Mark Mountjoy, a captain in the American merchant service."

Planter Shields then grasped the hand of the young sailor, and thanked him warmly for the

service he had rendered him in saving his daughter from a fate worse than death.

"Why, Captain Mountjoy, that villain had it all arranged to force my daughter into a marriage with him, and thus, as she has a large fortune in her own right, to get possession of it."

"But you must not say us nay, sir, now that we have found you, but go with us to my plantation as our guest, for our carriage awaits us yonder."

It was useless to refuse, so Mark Mountjoy was driven to his hotel, and then went home with the planter and his beautiful daughter.

After a few days passed at the beautiful home he took his leave, as he said his vessel was to sail soon, and he carried with him the heart of Alma Shields, who little dreamed under what circumstances they next would meet.

CHAPTER V.

UNDER SABLE COLORS.

A MURDER had been committed in New Orleans—a distinguished citizen halted in the streets at night and told to deliver up his purse.

A bold man, he had resisted, and he had received his death-wound, though he had brought the robber down with a stunning blow.

Help had come and the robber had been arrested.

It was Leo Shields, and with death on the gallows staring the young man in the face, the father and sister determined to save him.

They spent gold with lavish hand, did all in their power to save his life.

But all to no use, for he was condemned to die on the gallows, and then came the startling confession that he had, while acting with power of attorney for father and sister, during their visit to France a year before, mortgaged their property and gambled away their all, keeping up the interest however as to hide his crime.

The crash came with a fearful blow, for the poor planter took his own life the day his son was hanged, and Alma, with a few thousands only left was glad to fly from the scenes where she had reigned as a belle and seek a home with a relative in the far North.

She had taken passage for Boston on a pretty brig, whose skipper now and then carried passengers, and she was given the best state-room, and in fact the entire use of the cabin, for she was alone.

The brig sailed well, and was a stanch craft as well, comfortable, and all that could be done for the pleasure of the beautiful passenger the captain and his mates did do.

It was off Hatteras one afternoon, when Alma, dressed in deep black, and with her beautiful face wearing a look of settled sadness, came on deck to find the brig flying along under clouds of canvas, and astern of her a league a large schooner evidently in chase.

She saw at a glance that something was wrong, for the faces of the captain and his crew showed it, and they looked confused when she appeared.

"That vessel seems to be in chase, Captain Todd," she said.

"Well, miss, we are havin' a leetle race," was the reply.

"A race with an armed vessel, Captain Todd, looks to me like a chase."

"What is yonder craft, sir?"

"To tell you the truth, miss, we do think he is a pirate," said the skipper, seeing that he could not deceive his beautiful passenger.

"A pirate! so bad as that, sir?" asked Alma, and her lovely face paled as she glanced at the pursuing schooner.

"We fear so, miss, me and my mates, for he has an ugly look and shows no flag in answer to ours."

"And he is gaining?"

"A little, miss, and its surprising, as the Pretty Peggy has always shown her heels to all other craft before."

"She is gaining rapidly, Captain Todd; and see! they are clearing a gun forward to open on us," and Alma Shields gazed through her own glass, which she had brought on deck, at the pursuing vessel.

The schooner was flying along easily and certainly gaining steadily upon the brig, and it seemed a surprise to all that knew the splendid speed of the Pretty Peggy.

The pursuer was armed, carried no flag, and, if a cruiser, was seemingly trying to make those on the brig think otherwise.

Alma stood on deck watching her, with strange interest. All her worldly possessions were on the brig, all that she had saved from the wreck of her home, and in the cabin locked was a bag of gold, amounting to some three thousand dollars.

Should the schooner be a pirate she and her little fortune were at his mercy.

But grief had been her lot of late, and she had learned to suffer in silence.

In her brilliant social career her heart had never been touched by a single one of her many lovers.

She had been indifferent to all, and had reached the age of twenty heart free.

She had dearly loved her father and brother,

and, wild as the latter had suddenly become, when he had promised so well, she had done all in her power to aid him.

Then had come the kidnapping act of a discarded lover, and she met Mark Mountjoy.

From the moment she had looked into his splendid eyes she had known her fate.

"My destiny is to love that man," she had said to herself.

After his visit to the plantation he had gone off on a voyage in his schooner, and then had come her brother's crime, trial, execution and the sweeping away of their fortune, which had ended in the death of her father.

What dreams she might have had, of again meeting Mark Mountjoy, and missing his love, were broken by the events that had happened, and Alma was only anxious to fly far from the scene of her girlhood, and seek a refuge with a relative whom she had after helped out of her bounty, and whose home was in Portland, Maine.

And now another blow was facing her, one that might be worse than all, should the schooner astern prove to be, as Captain Todd feared a pirate.

"She still gains, miss," said the captain anxiously, and he glanced toward the setting sun, which was nearing the horizon. "If we could only have a storm, and night would come in, we could dodge him," the captain added.

But the skies were cloudless, and it would be an hour yet before darkness, so the hope of the skipper was vain.

"See there!"

As she uttered the words Alma saw a puff of white smoke come from the bows of the schooner.

Then came the boom of a gun, the roar of a solid shot, and with a ricochet the ball of iron flew over the deck of the brig.

There was no doubting but that the pursuer was in earnest, but Captain Todd still held on.

"It's best to risk getting away, miss; but please go below," he urged.

"No, I shall remain on deck, for I am deeply interested in the chase," and Alma smiled recklessly.

She seemed not to care if death should be her fate at a pirate's hands.

Again came a shot, and again, the last one striking the brig.

The Pretty Peggy still held on, however, hoping against hope, as her skipper was, until suddenly the schooner luffed sharp, and poured a broadside upon the flying brig.

The result was disastrous, for the bowsprit was cut away, and several of the sails came down, while the Pretty Peggy swept around broadside to her pursuer.

Nor was this all, for Captain Todd and three seamen fell dead, and several more were wounded.

Alma had not flinched under the broadside, but stood her ground, calmly watching the schooner, up to the peak of which now went a black flag, in the center of which was a red star.

A few minutes more and the schooner ran alongside of the brig, and a spendid-looking man, cutlass in hand, leaped on board, to suddenly start back and drop his blade as there came from the lips of Alma Shields:

"Captain Mountjoy, and a pirate!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SAILOR'S CONFESSION.

It was indeed Mark Mountjoy, whose schooner had overhauled the merchant vessel, and at sight of the beautiful girl, whom he so suddenly and unexpectedly confronted, the sailor started back, his face flushing crimson, then becoming livid.

Having beheld him, and uttered the words that proved her recognition of the one who had saved her from the kidnappers, Alma Shields turned quickly away with a shudder, and went into the cabin.

An instant did the man whom she had called a pirate stand in deep, and evidently painful thought.

Then he called to one of his officers and said sternly:

"See that the wounded and dead on this vessel are at once cared for, and let not a thing be touched by one of my men."

Then he called to a negro steward of the Pretty Peggy, and said:

"Ask the lady in the cabin if she will permit me to come in and speak with her?"

"She just done tole me, sah, ter ask yer ter please come in de cabing, as she want ter see yer, sah, capt'in," replied the negro, who was terribly alarmed at being the captive of a pirate.

Mark Mountjoy doffed his hat, ran his hand through his waving curls and entered the cabin.

As he did so Alma Shields came forward to meet him.

Her hand was extended, and she said in a low, earnest tone:

"Captain Mountjoy, we meet again, and let me assure you that I feel no dread of you, because you come under the black flag and with cutlass in your hand."

"I feel that with you I am safe, though why

you have been driven to piracy Heaven only knows."

He did not touch her hand but said, and with emotion:

"Miss Shields, your kind words, your trust in me, cause me to feel deeply my position, and if I might, I would like to say something to you to palliate my being what I now appear to you, a pirate."

"Gladly will I hear anything that you have to say, Captain Mountjoy, for my interest in you, as—as a friend is so sincere, that I would be happy to know that you are not all that you now appear."

Mark Mountjoy was a splendid reader of human nature.

He had seen, when visiting at Planter Shields's home, that Alma was in love with him; but his one love in life, for Lola La Salle, had imbibed him, had made him shun women.

Now, as he gazed into the beautiful face of the planter's daughter, he saw there a true and nobler nature, and he saw one who loved him, be he what he might.

"I have given orders, Miss Shields, to my lieutenant, to care for the wounded and dead of your vessel, and not to touch one article on board the craft that I intended as my prize, so you need feel no anxiety on that score."

"But, it is my desire to explain to you, if I can do so, my present sad and miserable course."

"Will you listen to me?"

"Only too glad will I be to hear your explanation," she said, with a warmth she was unable to check.

The young rover captain was silent for a few minutes, until the silence became painful, and his brow was clouded the while, his lips set.

At last he said:

"Miss Shields, to explain the present, when I appear to you under the black flag of a freebooter, I must speak of the past, my past, one of wild waywardness and unhappiness, all brought on by my own mad career."

"I must tell you just what made me what I am."

Then he told the story of his reckless boyhood, of his love for Lola La Salle, his determination at last to lead an honored career and how he had tried hard to get a vessel and go back home to give luxuries to his parents in their declining years and marry the one he so dearly loved.

The bitter sorrows of his finding his parents dead and the maiden he had hoped to wed on the eve of marrying another, he told of, and then how he had gone forth and still toiled on in the career of honor he had chosen.

He had met her, Alma Shields, and intended to try and forget Lola in a new love for her.

But he had sailed in his vessel, it was taken by a pirate, and only by serving the outlaw as an officer had he saved himself from the yard-arm.

He had one day been caught by the pirate, when he meant to make his escape, and the two had fought it out then and there, and the freebooter captain had fallen by his hand.

Then he had proclaimed himself chief, and this was but three days before, and he had determined to drift wheresoever the tide of destiny would bear him.

The brig Pretty Peggy was his first willful act of outlawry, and it had been his fate to meet on her Alma Shields.

Such was his story, and then came the sad narrative of Alma Shields. He listened attentively to the relation of the incidents that wrought her sorrows and sufferings, and she said in ending:

"How strange that we should thus meet again."

"Yes, strange indeed, and it seems to me that it was predestined; at least I would so like to think, Alma, and I pledge you my word that from to-day I haul down the black flag, turn my vessel into a merchant craft, and seek to win your love, if I may be so bold as to hope, knowing me now as you do, that I may one day come to your home in Maine and claim you as my wife. I await your answer."

"Sail ho!"

The cry came from the deck, and ere she could answer, the pirate lieutenant left in charge called down the companionway excitedly:

"Ho, captain, there is a cruiser bearing down directly upon us, and we are doomed!"

CHAPTER VII.

WARNED OFF.

MARK MOUNTJOY knew well the full meaning of the words uttered by his lieutenant, that a cruiser was bearing down upon them and they were doomed.

With the black flag still flying above his vessel, with his decks armed and crowded with lawless men, and lying alongside of the brig, which they had overhauled at the cannon's mouth and boarded, it meant the yard-arm to him if taken.

In vain would it be for him to plead that he had been captured by a pirate and been forced to serve as an outlaw officer, and this capture of the Pretty Peggy was his first lawless act, for it would serve him not.

He would be taken and quickly dealt with.

So he sprang to his feet and said:

"You have time to think of my words, Alma,

for I will come for your answer; but I will be true to myself, true to you, though now, if I have to fight off this cruiser, I feel that you will not hold that against me."

"For God's sake, come, captain!" came from on the deck, and Alma cried:

"Go! go and save yourself!"

He sprang up the companionway and reached the deck of the brig.

There lay his schooner alongside, his crew at the guns, and she was held by one grappling-iron to the brig.

His lieutenant was on the brig, but ready to spring on board the schooner, and the crew of the merchant vessel, with a cruiser near at hand, were in an ugly humor.

There, not half a mile away, came the cruiser, a large brig-of-war, and she was bearing down directly upon the two vessels, as though knowing that something was wrong.

The moon had risen and the sea was bathed in a silvery light that rendered all distinctly visible for a long way off.

Leaping on board his own vessel, Mark Mountjoy gave the order:

"Cast off!"

The schooner swung apart from the brig, and the latter was kept between her and the cruiser from the course which Mountjoy headed.

But the brig could not protect him long, for the cruiser was soon in full view and luffing sharp sent a broadside into the pirate.

It was a severe fire and cut down a number of men, dismounted a gun and tore some the sails into ribbons.

But, as though the discharge of the broadside had checked it, the wind suddenly lulled and a dead calm fell upon the sea.

Not a fathom did either of the three vessels move over the waters, and then was heard from on board the cruiser:

"Lower away the boats and carry her by boarding!"

"Stand to your guns, and double shot with canister and grape!" came the stern command of Mark Mountjoy, who had not returned the fire of the cruiser, disastrous as it was, though his men were at their guns and marveled greatly at his not doing so.

The moment that Mark Mountjoy had left the cabin of the Pretty Peggy, Alma Shields had gone on deck.

She saw the situation at once, and felt that the chances were terribly against the escape of the schooner from so swift and powerful an adversary as the cruiser appeared to be.

Captain Todd's body and that of the seamen who had been killed, had been removed from the deck, and the wounded also cared for, so that there was nothing to shock her eyes as she glanced over the vessel.

She saw the cunning act of the pirate, using the Pretty Peggy as a shield from the cruiser's fire, to make his escape, and she hoped that it would be successful.

But as the cruiser drew near she suddenly shot out to one side and sent a broadside upon the flying schooner.

The crashing of timbers came to Alma's ears as the shot tore through the schooner, and to her lips came the prayer:

"Heaven shield him from harm!"

Then came the lull in the wind, and the order of the armed brig's commander to lower away the boats to attack the outlaws.

"It must end as I feared it would," murmured the maiden, wringing her hands anxiously.

On board the brig the mate had taken charge, but the calm prevented his moving the Pretty Peggy out of range.

With her glass Alma Shields saw that the schooner had lowered her black flag, and she muttered:

"He has kept his word."

Then from on board the cruiser came the hail:

"Aho! what brig is that?"

"The Pretty Peggy, American packet, out of New Orleans and bound for Boston," responded the mate.

"Ay, ay, I will board you," and a boat shot off from the side of the cruiser, and a moment after an officer leaped on board of the brig.

He was a handsome man and seeing Alma raised his hat while he said:

"I fear you have had a painful experience, lady, for I recognize yonder schooner as the craft of Castello the Corsair."

Alma remembered that Mark Mountjoy had spoken of the pirate chief who had captured him as Castello, and she said:

"Yes, sir, but I was not treated unkindly, nor was the brig robbed of anything."

"But would have been, sir, had not your cruiser been sighted," the mate remarked, for he knew not what had been going on in the cabin, and supposed that Alma had been pleading with the pirate while he was in the cabin, or arranging terms of ransom.

"I am glad we were so fortunate as to appear; but I hope soon to capture the pirate, for my boats are ready, I see."

"Pray do not remain on deck, miss, for shots are no respecters of person and fly wildly at times."

"If you get a breeze and hold on your way, sir, please report meeting the American brig-of-war Antelope, Captain Roland Monte," and with a bow the officer returned to his boat, which at once took its position at the head of the half-dozen that had come from the vessel, and were crowded with armed men.

Then they moved forward, with strong, quick strokes for the schooner.

Unheeding the advice of Captain Monte, and the entreaty of the mate of the Pretty Peggy, Alma Shields remained on deck.

Her eyes eagerly followed the boats over the moonlit waters, as they rushed to the attack upon the schooner, which lay quiet and silent upon the sea.

Then from the schooner, in a voice that thrilled Alma Shields, came a hail:

"Aho! Ho, boats, aho!"

"Ay, ay," responded Captain Monte's deep tones.

"This schooner is no pirate, but I will not be boarded. Keep off, or the result be on your head!" said Mountjoy.

"Do you surrender?"

"I do not," was the ready response.

"I do not wish bloodshed, sir, if it can be avoided, so let me board alone and see your papers!"

"No, keep off, or I will fire upon you!"

"Give way, men, and board her!" shouted Captain Monte, and with a cheer the boats moved on once more to attack the outlaw schooner.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VISIT TO THE ANTELOPE.

"I REGRET to fire upon them, but it is beat them off, or the yard-arm for me," said Mark Mountjoy bitterly, as the boats from the Antelope came on once more to the attack, for, during the hail and what had followed between the two commanders, the men had rested on their oars.

But there was no alternative, for what he had done he could not explain away.

If he refused to fire upon the boats, his own desperate crew would have done so, and then have hanged him as a traitor, he well knew.

So reluctantly, yet with a voice that was distinctly heard by Alma on the brig, he asked:

"Will you keep off with those boats?"

"No!"

"Fire!"

The schooner reeled under the fire of her broadside, and the shots were desperately well aimed, for two boats were sunk, and not one but caught it severely.

Then the fire was returned by the marines in the boats, the oarsmen once more pressed on, unwounded men springing to the places vacated by death, and the attack was pressed forward once more.

The guns of the schooner were again fired, small-arms rattled, and suddenly, just as it had lulled, the wind sprung up, and Mark Mountjoy's voice arose above the din, calling the crew to set sail.

The schooner forged ahead, just as the boat in the lead was alongside, and Captain Monte leaped on deck; but ere the daring officer could be run through by the pirates, Mark Mountjoy seized him in his arms and threw him back into his boat, thus saving his life, for the furious pirate crew would have cut him down.

The schooner, having gained headway, was now crowded with sail, just as two more boats, filled with men, left the side of the Antelope and the merchant brig sent another.

The wind seemed to have struck the schooner first, for she was sailing swiftly along before the sails of the two brigs had filled, and she held her course so that the cruiser could not fire on her over the heads of her boats' crews.

Having to pick up her boats the brig lost time, and when she was well away in chase of the schooner the latter vessel was half a league ahead, crowded with canvas and flying along like a frightened deer.

To the surprise of all on the two brigs—all except Alma Shields—the pirate had not fired again upon the boats or the Antelope, after having beaten off the attack; but, once in full chase, the cruiser opened savagely from her bow gun.

Still the recreant schooner did not reply, and soon ran out of range, and disappeared far away over the moonlit sea.

Having escaped his strong pursuer, Mark Mountjoy paced his deck with feelings of thankfulness.

He had given his promise to Alma, and he meant to keep it.

But how?

He did not wish his craft to still remain a pirate, where he could render the country service.

At last he made up his mind as to his course. He had discovered on board a treasure hidden away by the pirate Costello, of which the men knew nothing. They were clamorous for money, and he decided to gain their good will. So the second day after the escape from the brig, having decided upon his course, he called the men together, and taking about half of the hidden treasure brought it upon deck.

Then he said:

"Men, I desire to begin my career as your chief square with you, and so I have here the treasure of your late Captain Costello, which I found in a secret locker in the cabin, and this I intend to give over to you."

A wild cheer greeted his words, and Mountjoy continued:

"I shall divide it equally among you, and then I desire to carry the schooner into port and fit her out."

"To do this we must send our guns into the hold, disguise the craft as best we can, and run in as a merchant craft."

"I need your aid in this, and I will do that which I deem best for all of us."

One week after, the schooner, stripped of her guns and her warlike look, glided up the Mississippi River one night to an anchorage above the city of New Orleans.

Giving orders to his lieutenant to keep three-fourths of the men out of sight below decks and allow no one to go ashore, Mountjoy got into the dinghy and rowed to the city.

He made his boat fast, walked along the levee until he was opposite to a vessel-of-war, which he had observed as he passed up by her, and which he had recognized as the brig-of-war Antelope.

He had in fact—though barely keeping the Antelope in sight—followed her course and entered New Orleans port soon after her, and he had a motive in doing this, which the reader will soon discover.

Captain Roland Monte sat in his cabin looking over his mail, which an officer had brought him from the shore.

He was a man of striking appearance, and though in command of the Antelope, and called captain, so by courtesy only, for he was a senior lieutenant.

A young man, he came of good family, and he it was who had won and wedded Ethel, the twin sister of Lola La Salle, and it was at the old home where he dwelt, Mark Mountjoy had gone to learn from the lips of the maiden he loved that she was to be sacrificed for gold and money to an old man to save her father from ruin.

A midshipman entering the cabin told Captain Monte that a gentleman had come on board who wished particularly to see him.

"Admit him," was the reply, and a moment after Mark Mountjoy entered.

Captain Monte saw at a glance that he was no ordinary personage, and he said:

"Be seated, sir, and let me know how I can serve you, please."

Mountjoy took the seat to which the brig's commander motioned him, and said in a low voice:

"Captain Monte, I have come to see you, sir, upon a matter of life and death to me."

"So serious, sir; but where have we met before?"

"You shall know all in good time, sir; but I must first have from you a pledge that you will not betray my confidence, for I have to place implicit trust in you, sir."

"Certainly I will give you the pledge, sir; but let me first ask who it is that I have the pleasure of meeting."

"My name is Mark Mountjoy, sir. Perhaps you have heard of me," was the quiet response.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TERMS OF SURRENDER.

MOUNTJOY noticed the start of the captain of the Antelope as he mentioned his name.

He knew that he had heard of him, and doubtless much that was unkind and bitter.

"Yes, I have heard of you, sir, if you are the young gentleman once known in a small New England seaport, under the name of Mad Mark Mountjoy?" and Captain Monte gazed fixedly upon his visitor.

"I am, sir."

"You were the son of a clergyman, sir, and went to sea, I believe, when a mere lad, but won your way to a midshipman's berth for pluck and gallant service?"

"It is kind of you, Captain Monte, to remember the good acts of my life, and I thank you, sir."

"Yes, I won my way to a midshipman's berth, and my wild career lost me the rank; but I began again and a second time got the place, to again lose it, for the Devil had a strong hold on me, sir, and I was getting out of my teens before I could shake off the grip of his Satanic Majesty."

"But I did so, worked my way to the command and ownership of a schooner, and with hope ahead returned to my old home to atone for the past."

"I never heard aught of you that was really wicked, sir, other than your intense nature for mischief," said Captain Monte, kindly, and he was trying to forget that he had heard that the stern, sad-faced man before him had broken the heart of his old father and mother.

But Mark Mountjoy had atoned, he knew, by giving to the rector in his father's stead, money for a monument to be erected over his parents, and for the good of the poor of the little parish.

"You are inclined, Captain Monte, to be merciful; but let me tell you that I suffered

bitterly when I returned, to find my parents dead, and more still, when, with her own lips, the one I had so dearly loved told me she was to marry another.

"That maiden you know, so are well aware of what I lost, what I have to carry in my heart—I refer to your wife's sister, Lola La Salle."

"Ha!" and Captain Monte started.

This then was the romance in the life of his beautiful sister-in-law.

He had heard that she had loved a wild scapegrace, and knew that she had not loved the man she had married, Peter Rutledge, a man old enough to be her grandfather, a man said to be a miser, and who had seemed so well to see the incongruity of his making Lola his wife, that he had gotten a miniature of her, set in a massive gold frame studded with gems of great value and had the strange conceit on it of a diamond hand grasping a pearl hand, with the French words, set in rubies:

"*Le jour viendra.*"

This Captain Monte had seen and marveled much, as though the old miser had known that his rich hand, expressed in diamonds, was grasping the hand of a pure young girl, expressed in pearls, and dreaded the future, as the foreboding words foretold—"The day will come"—in its ruby letters.

And this then was Mark Mountjoy, the daring, reckless scapegrace whom the beautiful Lola, his wife's sister, had loved.

"I have heard Lola speak of you, and my wife, too, Mr. Mountjoy, and always with kindness."

"I knew, too, that Lola's heart had not gone with her hand; but I never heard the name of her lover," and Captain Monte spoke with a feeling of deepest interest.

Mark Mountjoy was silent a moment, and then said:

"After what I had lost, sir, I was almost driven to desperation; but I rallied, and again set to work, and my schooner was making me money, when adversity came upon me, for I was captured by Costello the Corsair, off the island of Hayti."

"Ah! I had a brush with him ten days ago, and he beat me off."

Mark Mountjoy smiled and said:

"He robbed me of my vessel, made my crew, who would not join him, walk the plank, put what gold I had saved up in his own lockers, and then said to me that he needed a first officer and the berth was open to me, and I could take my choice between accepting it or being hanged."

"I chose the berth of first officer, sir."

"Under existing circumstances, sir, one can hardly blame you."

"Again kind to me, sir, I see; but I served Costello until a chance offered for me to escape, and I made the attempt, when the man who was to aid me I found was in the pay of his chief, and betrayed me."

"Costello ordered me strung up, and I dared him to personal encounter, and he accepted."

"I ran him through the heart, proclaimed myself chief, and started upon a cruise."

"The brig *Pretty Peggy* was my first prize—"

"Ha! the very vessel I overhauled, and—"

"My men were mutinous, and I overhauled the *Pretty Peggy*, as I told you; but I did her no harm, and meant to leave her unmolested, when your brig came down upon us."

"You know the result, sir; but you do not know that I had to fire upon you or be strung up by my men, and—"

"I recall that you only fired, sir, as though to beat me off, and I now remember that, where you could have killed me yourself, you struck up the boarding pikes of your men, seized me and threw me back into my boat."

"I owe you my life, Captain Mountjoy."

"You owe me nothing, sir, but a faithfulness to your pledge."

"I kept you in sight, followed you in here, making my men believe that we had to come here and refit, and so put all of our guns in the hold, and, disguised as a merchant vessel, I ran up the river and anchored above you, after which I came aboard your brig."

"You are a bold man, Captain Mountjoy."

"I came, sir, to tell you that within two hours you can come on board the schooner and take her as a prize."

"I shall be there to receive you, sir, disguised as an old seaman, and, after turning over to you the vessel, and the treasure of Costello now there in a secret locker, I shall go ashore, and go my way."

"But I desire to first let you get possession of Costello the Corsair's famous vessel, her guns and treasure."

"And her men?"

"My dear Captain Monte, I brought those men in here, to give up their vessel, but I would not betray them to the gallows, no, I would not do that, though I will give up their craft as a means of ending their piratical careers, for, with their old chief dead, and their schooner a prize, they will doubtless give up their evil career."

"Suppose I demand the surrender of the crew with their vessel, in return for giving you your pardon?" asked Captain Monte calmly.

"Then, sir, I shall return on board of the

schooner and take my chances with the pirate crew, for I am not a man to betray the lives of those who trust me, whatever I may do to serve the Government by giving up their vessel," was the bold response of Mark Mountjoy.

CHAPTER X.

THE DESERTED SCHOONER.

FOR full a minute, Captain Monte was silent; then he held forth his hand and said warmly:

"You are a true man, Captain Mountjoy, as well as a daring and determined one. I understand your present position perfectly and appreciate it. There is my hand on it that you have a friend in me."

The young rover grasped the outstretched hand as he responded:

"I am fortunate in having you to deal with, Captain Monte, for another officer in your place might force me to carry out my threat and die with my fellow rovers."

"You understand, then, that, within two hours you are to move upon the schooner with your boats?"

"I do, sir."

"I will have told the men that we are known to be in port, and will be seized, so send them ashore; then I will return and receive you, sir."

"I understand, Captain Mountjoy."

"And I am, after giving over to you the vessel, to go ashore at my will?"

"Yes, sir; and I believe if your part in this affair was reported to the Government you would be again commissioned—"

"No, no! not now, not now, for I have no ambition to again receive a commission in the American Navy, from which I have been twice dismissed," declared Mark Mountjoy sadly.

The words seemed to touch the naval officer, for he said:

"Your career was a wild, reckless one, but not sinful, and I do not condemn you as others might for your having turned rover to save your life."

"Ah, sir, you are kind to me, and others are not. But I will not again seek service in the navy, for I carry with me the consciousness that my sinful life broke my parents' hearts, and also took from me the woman I loved."

"Now, with my parents dead, and the one I loved—yes, still love—the wife of another, I have no ambition further to live a prosy, honorable career."

"I will expect you, sir, within two hours."

"I will be on board, sir."

"You can say for the papers that the pirates got wind of your proposed attack, so deserted their vessel."

"Yes, that will be the best way. A glass of wine with you, Captain Mountjoy, and to your future prosperity and happiness."

A sad smile crossed the face of Mark Mountjoy as he drank the wine, and a moment after he was gone.

He returned to the schooner in his own boat, and hastily called his crew together.

"Men, our presence in port is known, and there is but one way to save your necks from the yard-arm, and that is to go ashore and hastily—Hold! do not be reckless, but hear me."

"You are to hastily disperse through the city, getting quarters where best you can, and take with you your kits and valuable property, for the schooner will be seized."

"If you do not hear from me within a week then seek service afloat elsewhere."

"Now get ready and depart in the boats as fast as you can do so without attracting attention from other vessels."

"Won't you set her afire, sir?" said one of the men.

"And thus draw attention to us, when, as it is, we can get away undiscovered?"

The men hastened below to obey orders, and soon the boats were lowered, and one by one pulled ashore.

Mark Mountjoy went last in the dinghy, with several of the men, and the schooner was left utterly deserted.

As the men landed at different points they left their boats and hastened away into the city to seek quarters, which many of them knew just where to find.

Mark Mountjoy hastened off alone, and after going a short distance turned and retraced his steps.

The dinghy was where he had left it, and he was soon on his way out to the schooner.

Her lights were burning as he had left them, and running alongside he sprang on board.

All was silent and deserted, and he stood gazing sadly at the pretty vessel, which, in spite of her peaceful look, had been such a terror upon the seas.

Her crew had gone, her guns were below in the hold, her magazine hidden under a pile of freight, and she looked little like the dangerous foe to commerce which she had proven under the command of Costello the Corsair.

Going to the cabin companionway he opened it and entered.

The lamp burned brightly and the cabin was a picture of beauty, for Costello had fitted it up with every luxury and many rare articles he had picked up in his many piracies.

Mark Mountjoy stood gazing about him a

moment, and there was a strange expression upon his face as he said aloud:

"With this beautiful vessel I could win a fortune, blood-stained though it was, that would dwarf the riches of the old miser she sold herself to for gold!"

Then he sighed and seemed lost in painful reverie.

At last he said:

"Well, it is no harm to take back my own, that of which Costello robbed me. That at least I will do. Let me see, I had three thousand in gold, and the schooner cost me double that sum. So I will take just nine thousand, and thank Heaven no dollar of that is blood-stained, and it is my own by right."

"And that leaves five times that sum in jewels, gold and booty with the prize, besides the schooner, her battery and all her other belongings."

He stepped up to a painting that hung in the cabin, touched a spring, and, swinging open on hinges it revealed a closet in which was stored a fortune in gold, silver and gems.

Taking up a belt heavy with gold he buckled it around his waist under his coat, and then emptied the contents of two buckskin bags into his pockets.

"That is my all," he said aloud, as he turned from the secret treasure store to discover that he was not alone on the deserted pirate schooner, for two seamen had entered the cabin and confronted him, each armed with a cutlass.

At a glance Mark Mountjoy recognized the seamen. They were two of the pirate crew, and their return meant death to him.

"Well, what do you want here, men?" he demanded, sternly, knowing he was in for a death-struggle.

"We two hain't such fools as you thought us cap'n, though t'others is, and we kinder suspected you was playin' us foul, so put back in yer wake, followed you aboard and here we is," said one of the men.

"And you are alone?"

"We is, but enough to board and carry you, cap'n, if it comes to a fight."

"Well, it will come to it, I guess; but what do you want?"

"Shares."

"In what?"

"You put back to get your treasure and then desert the ship; but we are sailing in company, so want our share."

"This money and treasure here belonged to your former chief, and myself, so all is mine, if I so desire to take it."

"Well, you don't intend ter let it go with ther ship?"

"I do, excepting what I have just taken."

"No, sir, we wants it."

"You cannot have it."

"That we at least will find out."

"Come, Jack, cut the cap'n down and all the treasure is ours!" cried one of the pirates and the two sprung forward, cutlass in hand.

Mark Mountjoy had told Captain Monte that he would surrender the pirates' gold and booty with the schooner, and he would defend it with his life.

Then, too, these men sought his life, and if he did not kill them they would have it.

Again, if they got free he would be betrayed to all the others of the crew as a traitor to them.

These thoughts flashed like lightning through his brain, and in an instant he was ready for his foes.

A superb swordsman, one who had never met his superior, he yet knew that he had two stubborn men to fight.

CHAPTER XI.

A PLEDGE KEPT.

THE moment that the two pirates sprung, with drawn cutlasses to attack Mark Mountjoy, he met them more than half-way.

He had hastily closed the painting, that formed the secret door of the treasure closet, and grasped a jewel-bilted cutlass that hung near, and, quick as a flash one of the pirates felt the keen edge of the blade and that of the other crossed it only for a moment, when the second man fell dead by the side of his comrade.

At the same instant Captain Monte leaped down into the cabin, his drawn sword in hand, for he had boarded the schooner, and, hearing the clash of steel, had hastened to the scene.

"Bid your men leave, sir, I beg of you!" cried Mountjoy, hastily turning his back toward the companionway, for he knew there must be men in the cruiser's crew to whom he was known.

"Men, leave the cabin! I'll see to this affair," called out Captain Monte, quickly, and he checked them just as they would have followed him.

The companionway was quickly closed, and then Captain Monte turned to Mark Mountjoy for an explanation of the tragic scene.

It was at once given in the cool manner of the young man.

"I got the men ashore, sir, and returned alone; but then two seamen followed me, demanded the treasure and attacked me."

"The result is before you, Captain Monte, and I asked the withdrawal of your men as I had no

time to disguise myself and do not wish to be recognized by any one."

"You are right, sir, and I will see that you leave the vessel quietly."

"Thank you, Captain Monte, and permit me to turn the vessel over to you."

"Her guns are in the hold, and here is the secret treasure-closet—see, behind this painting, and to open it just touch this spring."

"Excepting what I gave to the men to entice them into this port, and took back what I had been robbed of, the treasure is there."

"And a rich one it is; but permit me to urge that you help yourself, ere I lay hands upon it as prize money for my crew."

"No, I have all I will need, sir, thank you, and which is legitimately my own."

"I will say good-by now, Captain Monte."

"One minute, while I send the men forward, so you can leave without being recognized."

Captain Monte went on deck, but soon returned, and ten minutes after, with his hat drawn down over his eyes, and a cloak concealing his form, Mark Mountjoy left the cabin of the schooner, while the man to whom he was drawn most kindly, not only from admiration of him, but because he was the husband of Lola's twin sister, said warmly:

"Remember, Captain Mountjoy, you will always find me your friend."

That very night Mark Mountjoy set sail in a packet for Boston, and the following day the papers had the full account of the capture of the schooner of Costello the Corsair, and the reported slaying of pirate chief.

But the secret of the taking of the schooner was known to but two persons, Captain Roland Monte and Mad Mark Mountjoy.

Without adventure Mark Mountjoy reached Boston, and he at once set about the purchase of a small vessel, which he meant to put in the coast trade, as he cared not to go far from the one who he now knew loved him so devotedly, and whom he wished to make his wife.

He secured a pretty little schooner, which had been captured from smugglers and was offered for sale, and putting the craft in perfect trim, he shipped a crew which he was most careful to pick, for he wished only half a dozen men, but was determined that they should be first-class seamen.

Then he sailed for Salem, and caught in a blow, he was delighted with the stanch qualities of his vessel, as well as her very great speed.

The port he sought was Salem, and arriving there he purchased a pretty cottage on the harbor shore, and set carpenters to work to put it in perfect order, after which it was to be thoroughly furnished.

"I will have a home to offer her, a vessel to make a living with, and a few hundred dollars in hand for a rainy day," he said, as he set sail from Salem and laid his course for the coast of Maine.

Several days after the sailing of the Winged Arrow, as Mark Mountjoy had named his schooner, a young girl was seated upon the porch of a pretty cottage that overlooked Casco Bay.

A glance was sufficient to show that it was Alma Shields, and her beautiful face was sad, her eyes dim with tears.

She had reached the home of her kinswoman, a dear old lady, and received a warm welcome, and a heart full of sympathy.

She had told her sad story, of loss of fortune, father and brother, and how she loved one whom the dread came to her she would never see again.

Would Mark Mountjoy give up his lawless life for her?

It had been a severe blow to her to know that he had raised the black flag; but she had listened to his story and believed it.

Yet, might he not be tempted to still lead the wild, sinful life of a freebooter?

She had noticed that he had warned off the cruiser's boats, and every word said by him had reached her ears, as she stood on the deck of the packet brig, Pretty Peggy.

That he could have done far more red work than he did she was well aware, and when his vessel had caught a breeze and sailed away she was happy at his escape.

The Pretty Peggy had gone on her way, and she had reached her destination, and she tried to be happy; but all the bitter past would come before her, with dread for the future, and her eyes filled with tears as she sat upon the little porch, some knitting untouched in her lap.

Suddenly she saw a pretty little schooner running down toward the cottage, and a few moments after she luffed and dropped anchor, and a boat put out from the shore.

Hastily running into the cottage, Alma Shields returned with a glass, and the words broke from her lips:

"He has kept his word, for it is Mark Mountjoy."

She went down toward the beach, and the two met in a pine grove where no eye was upon them.

"Alma, I have come to tell you that I took my schooner to New Orleans, discharged my crew, and surrendered her, with her guns and

treasure to Captain Mountjoy, of the brig whose boats I beat off that day.

"My own money I used to buy yonder craft to earn a living with, and I have a little home in Salem all ready to take you to."

"Will you be my wife, Alma, and go with me?"

Her answer was to put her arms about his neck and say:

"Yes, gladly, Mark; but we must take dear, good old Aunt Lucy with us. Come, and let me show her what a splendid man I love with all my heart and soul."

CHAPTER XII.

AN OLD GRUDGE.

THERE were evil-minded people in Salem who did not receive kindly the coming into their midst of the young Skipper Mountjoy and his beautiful wife, and soon dark rumors were in circulation regarding them.

In the first place, the Winged Arrow was a fleet craft than any other coaster, and a more comfortable one, and she got most of the passengers and freights to and from the ports to which she made her voyages.

This naturally gave rise to envy and jealousy among other skippers to see a stranger come to their port and get the better of them in patronage.

Then no one seemed to know the Mountjoys or aught regarding them.

They had come to Salem and "put on airs," as the gossips had it, and it was hinted that they had, the young sailor and his wife, broken the heart of a dear old woman, who had died more than two months after their coming, leaving them in possession of a "vast fortune."

And yet, though they multiplied the few hundreds that poor "Aunt Lucy" had left into a vast fortune, the gossips did not seem to marvel that the young skipper should still keep his little schooner.

Finding that they seemed not to be welcome, Mark Mountjoy and Alma held themselves aloof from the Salemites, seeking no society, and living pretty much to themselves.

After Aunt Lucy's death Alma often went with her husband on his voyages, which lasted from two to three weeks, leaving their house in the charge of a faithful old servant who had been the standby of Miss Lucy Finch for two-score years, and had accompanied her from Maine to her new home.

One day when he returned from his run, Mark Mountjoy's breast was made glad with the tidings that he was a father, and old Sarah, who met him as he landed, said with a merry twinkle in her eyes:

"You're a father, Captain Mark, and there are two of 'em, both boys."

Mark grasped the old woman's hand and hastened on to the cottage, at a pace faster than she could follow, and there he learned that he was indeed the happy father of two splendid boys.

He allowed his mate to take the Winged Arrow out on her next run, and he remained at home to be near his wife and aid her in her increased cares.

One afternoon he came home and Alma, who watched every expression of his face, asked quickly:

"What has gone wrong, Mark?"

"You have good eyes, Alma, to see what I intended to conceal from you, for I admit that I am worried."

"Tell me of your worry, Mark," and she came and sat by him.

"Well, you know I have always wondered why we were received so coldly here?"

"Yes, it has fretted me as well."

"I saw no one here who had known me as Mad Mark Mountjoy, or afterwards on Costello's schooner, and yet I noticed a marked coldness toward both of us."

"And so did I Mark, and could not understand it, for we asked no favor, and you had your own vessel and home."

"True, and I was startled one day to overhear two of my men talking, and what they said angered me, in spite of its being such nonsense."

"What did they say, Mark?"

"Why that poor Aunt Lucy was very rich, and you being her heiress, I had learned that she intended changing her will, on account of her hatred to me, and so had, by some means, been the cause of her death."

"Mark, this is shameful; infamous, and some one ought to be made to suffer for these cruel flings at you," said Alma indignantly.

"I tried to trace them to some reliable source, but could not, and so let it rest until to-day, when my mate told me that it was hinted the Winged Arrow was bringing in smuggled goods."

"Mark!"

"I do not wonder at your anger, Alma, for it is just, and I was so incensed, I at once determined to trace the lie to the fountain head."

"I questioned the mate, called up each one of the crew and asked about it, and discovered that the report seemed to come from a shipping firm of G—, that has a branch house here."

"What is the name of the firm, Mark?"

"Ezra Vail & Company."

"They are whalers?"

"Yes, and Captain Ezra Vail commands a fine whaling vessel, when he sees fit to go to sea."

"His father was a rich man, and he is some years older than I am."

"You know him then?" quickly asked Alma.

"We were on the same ship together, when he was a midshipman and I was cabin-boy, and he was from my native town and loved the one of whom I told you most desperately."

"She refused him, and he always regarded me as his rival and foe, and he is one to never forget a wrong done him, as I well know."

"I find that he cruises to Salem every month or two, and I believe that all this coldness toward us he is at the bottom of; but I shall see him and face him to answer for his infamous charges against me."

"Now I did not intend to worry you with this, Alma, but you saw something was the matter so I have told you; but do not fret, little woman, and all will come well," and Mark kissed his wife good-by and went down to his schooner, for she was to sail that afternoon.

All was in readiness as he reached the deck, and the Winged Arrow went flying out of Salem Harbor on her run to Portsmouth.

Hardly had she gained an offing when the mate pointed to a vessel astern, and evidently in pursuit.

"It is the cruiser Vidette, sir—ha! and she is firing at us!"

As the mate spoke a puff of smoke came from the bows of the small armed schooner astern and a solid shot cut through the mainsail of the Winged Arrow.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDER A CLOUD.

CAPTAIN EZRA VAIL sat in his office in Salem, a place where he had a branch house of the rich firm of which he was a junior partner.

He was a young man, scarcely twenty-eight, and came of good New England stock.

His father had been a sea-captain before him, and Ezra Vail had entered the navy of the United States as a midshipman, and, with his good looks, liberal allowance of money and seamanship, he was much admired and very popular.

But suddenly, no one knew why, he resigned from the navy and returning home went as mate upon one of his father's vessels.

There was an ugly rumor in circulation that he had won from his fellow midshipmen a large sum at cards in the steerage one night, and it had been hinted that a cabin-boy had seen him cheat, and had told him to quit the service or he would betray him.

Be this as it may, Ezra Vail resigned and turned whaler.

Upon his return from a successful voyage he married a rich Boston girl, and soon after his father died and left him his sole heir, so that he went on whaling cruises only when he needed a little respite from business and sea air.

The result of his marriage was a son and heir, whom he named Rupert, and upon the day of his birth the father made a secret vow that the infant, when he grew to manhood, should be the richest young man in New England.

One day, when Rupert was a young lad, he accompanied his father to Salem, to see about his business there, and the merchant was seated in his office when, through the glass door he saw a man enter, the sight of whom caused him to turn deadly pale, and mutter to himself:

"That man in this town?"

"I thought he had turned pirate long ago."

The stranger remained in the outer office but a short while, talking with one of the clerks, and then departed.

"Rupert, go and tell Clerk Laws to come here," and the voice of the merchant trembled, while, as his little son went on his errand he arose and stepped to the window.

"Yes, there is no mistaking his face and form."

"But what is he doing, here?" muttered Ezra Vail, as he glanced through the window at the retreating form of the stranger.

Mr. Laws, an old clerk in the firm, came into the office just then.

"You wished to see me, Captain Vail?"

"Yes, Mr. Justin Laws, I wished to ask you who that man was who just left the office?"

"Captain Dunn, sir, of the ship Pelican."

"I know Captain Dunn, sir; I mean the young man?"

"Ah, yes, sir, that was Captain Mark Mountjoy of the coast packet schooner Winged Arrow."

"Captain Mark Mountjoy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Commanding a packet schooner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Running where?"

"To Portsmouth, and the Kennebec, sir, alternately."

"I see."

"Been long in the trade?"

"No, sir, he's a new man, only a couple of months here, but he's a thorough sailor and bought the smuggling schooner Jack-o'-Lan-

tern, which the Vidette captured six months ago."

"I see."

"And he bought a pretty home here, sir, and fetched his wife and her aunt with him, so he appears to be a man of some means."

"Yes; but what does Captain Mark Mountjoy want in my office, Mr. Laws?"

"He dropped in to let us know he would sail to-morrow, in case we had freight to send by him."

Captain Ezra Vail was silent, and walked to and fro with set lips and clouded brow, until little Rupert recalled him to himself with the remark:

"Father, what makes you turn so pale; are you sick?"

The whaler captain started, his face flushed and he said quickly:

"I am not just well, my son; but I was thinking, thinking of the past."

"Mr. Laws?"

"Yes, Captain Vail."

"You have been long in the service of Vail and Co."

"Twenty odd years, sir, man and boy."

"I believe I can place perfect confidence in you."

"I hope so, sir."

"It will be to your interest, very much to your interest, Mr. Laws, to serve me."

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, I wish to have a talk with you to-night about this Captain Mark Mountjoy, so come to my room at the tavern about eight o'clock, and you need not mention your coming to any one."

"I will not, sir, and I will be there," said Justin Laws, who was a little, dried-up specimen of humanity, with hawk eyes and an avicious look that did not belie his true character.

"Father, you hate Captain Mountjoy, don't you?" said little Rupert, as Mr. Laws left the private office.

Again did the merchant whaler start.

"That boy sees too much, and I must be careful," he muttered to himself, and then said to his son:

"Hate him, oh no! but I knew one of his name long ago, my boy, and wish to know if it is the same gentleman."

That night, after Rupert had gone to bed, Justin Laws called at the tavern and was received by the whaler.

A decanter of brandy, with glasses, were upon the table, and having bade his visitor be seated, Captain Vail filled his glass with liquor and then began to cunningly draw him out to discover just what sort of a man he had to deal with, both drunk and sober.

What he discovered regarding his clerk seemed to satisfy him, for when the visitor departed, near midnight, Ezra Vail said in a low voice, as he accompanied him to the door:

"I will trust you, Laws, to put them under a cloud, and to-morrow I will see that your salary is raised half as much more than it is at present, while for your long and valuable services in our firm, I will present you with a cozy little house where you can live all to yourself. Good-night, and report to-morrow what you have done," and Justin Laws felt ten years younger as he walked home that night to his bachelor quarters in his boarding-house.

CHAPTER XIV.

DEFIED.

THE mate of the Winged Arrow had never seen his captain look as he did, when the cutter Vidette threw a ball through his mainsail.

His face became livid, and his eyes burned with a glare that was intense in its anger.

Anticipating, of course, that the Winged Arrow would be at once brought to, in obedience to the summons from a brazen throat, the mate and the crew sprung to the sheet ropes.

But they were startled by the thunder tones:

"Hold fast there!"

"Don't dare to touch a halyard without my order!"

The men were amazed, almost frightened as they gazed at their skipper, from whose lips now came the command:

"Set the topsails and flying-jib, Mr. Roslin."

"Do you mean to run for it, sir?" asked Mate Roslin, in surprise.

"You heard my orders, sir."

There was that in the face of Mark Mountjoy that forbade questioning, and further, it commanded obedience, and the mate repeated the order.

The men did not step as quickly to obey as their captain deemed they should, and springing toward the nearest he said, fiercely:

"Did you hear, sir, or do you intend to refuse obedience?"

The seaman had never seen his captain angry before.

It was a mood none of the crew had ever seen him in.

A better seaman they had never known, and one they deemed so good an officer, while he was never known to speak severely to one of his men without just cause.

They had discovered, however, that he would

be a bad man to arouse, and now they saw him rise in his anger and tower above them in a way that cowed them.

As one man they sprung to obey his bidding, though that bidding was to defy the order of a United States cruiser to come to.

The wind was fresh, and the Winged Arrow was bowling swiftly along under her lower sails only, while the Vidette, under all of her canvas had been steadily gaining upon the coaster for the past half-hour.

But, with the additional sail set, the Winged Arrow began once more to drop her pursuer.

In spite of the temporary delay upon the schooner, in setting the upper sails, she had not been more than two minutes without her extra canvas being spread, so that no second gun was fired from the cruiser, as it was not deemed for an instant that the skipper of a coaster would disobey the command to come to.

But instead, they saw the upper sails quickly set, and the coaster go slipping away at a livelier pace, which began to widen the space between them.

The captain of the cruiser, an arrogant, overbearing young man, could hardly believe his eyes.

"What! is he spreading more sail?"

"Has he not come to?" he cried, excitedly, of his officers.

"He is running for it, sir," responded a lieutenant.

This was now very evident, and Captain Spruel of the Vidette shouted out the order:

"At those bow guns there!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Blow that fellow out of the water."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the guns were loaded and fired.

But the coaster had gained considerable, she and the Vidette were both running fast, and the waves, as the Winged Arrow shot out into the open sea, aided also in preventing good aim from being obtained at first.

There were other vessels near, passing in and going seaward, and the crews of all wondered at seeing the daring schooner flying from a vessel-of-war.

"Up to her old tricks again, I guess," said the skipper of a brig, recognizing the Winged Arrow as a former smuggler craft.

Rapidly the pursuer kept up her fire, and now and then a shot would cut along the decks, or tear through the bulwarks or sails.

"The wind is fair for us, men, without work, so keep out of danger."

"Mr. Roslin, I will take the wheel, sir, so crouch there in the companionway," said Mark Mountjoy quietly.

"I do not fear, sir, to face what you are willing to," said the mate promptly.

"I wish none of you hurt, Mr. Roslin, but I will not come to unless that cruiser makes a wreck of my vessel."

"I have done no wrong, and had he wished to overhaul me he should have fired over me; but to send his first shot at me has angered me, and if he wants me then he has got to follow me to my anchorage," and the look of determination in the face of Mark Mountjoy showed that he meant just what he said.

As the shot flew about them dangerously near, the mate and crew did seek what shelter they could, while their skipper stood at the wheel, calm, fearless and defiant.

He sailed his vessel with consummate skill, and never let her waver from her course.

He held her to her work, though an occasional hard puff of wind would lay her well over until the lee scuppers were under.

But he did not even glance astern of him at his pursuer, nor did he flinch when a solid shot would go shrieking over his head.

When another would tear along his decks, or cut through his sails, he would smile grimly, yet never glance at his pursuer.

At last night fell upon the waters, and the cutter still kept up the chase, and her firing also, though the coaster had gained now so as to cause nearly every shot to fall short.

At midnight the Winged Arrow had Halibut Point abeam, and laid her course north by east for Portsmouth, having the wind now dead astern and sending her along at a ten-knot pace.

The cutter going a knot and a half slower to the hour, was off Straitsmouth Island, and still pressing on under all canvas, though she had ceased firing some time before, knowing that the coaster had dropped her out of range.

All night long did Mark Mountjoy stand at the wheel, saying to his mate and crew who came to relieve him:

"No, I shall be the one who must bear the blame, so you need do no more than you are compelled to."

When the sun rose the Isles of Shoals were astern of the fleet schooner, with the Vidette three leagues astern, yet still coming on with her canvas all drawing.

Running into the harbor of Portsmouth, Mark Mountjoy, instead of seeking his usual wharf, came to a way off shore and let fall his anchor.

The mate and crew seemed to expect him to give the order to lower away a boat for the shore, but he did nothing of the kind, and

quietly went into the cabin to breakfast at the call of his cook.

When he came on deck again the cutter was not a mile distant, and coming along with the look of a craft that carried an angry commander on her quarter-deck.

Running up near the Winged Arrow she dropped anchor, and immediately after a boat full of armed men left her side and headed for the little schooner.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SKIPPER'S THREAT.

CAPTAIN SPRUEL was in the stern-sheets of the boat, and he was in a very angry mood.

He had been defied, had been beaten by a coaster, when his Vidette was known to be the fleetest craft in those waters, and his enemy had arrived in port long enough ahead of him to carry what things he had on board that were contraband to the shore.

"Boat ahoy!" called out Mark Mountjoy as the schooner's boat drew near.

"Ahoy the coaster," sullenly replied the officer.

"Do you wish to come on board, sir?"

"I am coming."

"Ay, ay, sir," and Mark Mountjoy stepped to the gangway to receive his visitor.

Captain Spruel sprung on board, followed by a middy, a marine officer and a dozen men.

"I seize this craft, sir, in the name of the Government," he said, angrily, and his gaze met that of Mountjoy.

"On what charge, sir, may I ask?"

"Smuggling."

"Captain Spruel, you are a naval officer, sir, and have power behind you: but you should be careful not to make a charge you cannot substantiate."

The naval officer again glanced at the captain of the coaster.

What he saw showed him that he was speaking to no ordinary man.

There was that in the skipper of the Winged Arrow which commanded respect.

"I know, sir, that I am right, and this vessel is a smuggler."

"You are at liberty to search her, sir."

"You have removed your contraband goods ashore, then."

"My boat has not been lowered from its davits, sir, since I came in port."

"Some boat has come off to you then?"

"No, sir! The vessels at anchor around me will vouch for that."

"Well, sir, I shall make the search."

"Do so, please, for I wish you to know that you have made a mistake, a false charge against me."

The officer gave orders to his men and the search of the vessel was begun.

For an hour it went on, Mark Mountjoy quietly pacing the decks the while, utterly indifferent to the presence of the naval officers and their men on board.

"Did you find anything contraband, sir?" and there was a sneer in the voice of the young coaster.

"I did not, for you have hidden your smuggled goods well."

"Captain Spruel, for such I learn is your name," and Mountjoy's words were heard by all on the vessel, "you make a charge against me which you cannot prove, and I will not listen to another word from you against my honor."

"This is a free land, sir, and I am your equal, so be warned that I will not allow you to go too far."

The naval officer was astounded. The words of the young coaster seemed fairly to take his breath away.

At last he said:

"Do you dare to threaten me, sir?"

"I dare fling the lie in the teeth of any man who charges me with dishonor as you have. Now, leave my vessel, sir, or arrest me and seize her, as you please, for you have the power to do so."

All were amazed at the daring defiance of the young skipper, and Captain Spruel was almost beside himself with rage, when the lieutenant of marines said something to him in a low tone.

"You deny the charge, sir," he said quickly, turning upon Mountjoy, "and a search has failed to find smuggled goods; but I am not done with you yet, and I would know why you run from me when I asked you to come to?"

"Captain Spruel, I know sea courtesy as well as you do, for I have twice held rank in the United States Navy."

"You?"

"Yes, I! and having no guilty conscience, not knowing why you should pursue me, I held on."

"And yet I sent a shot to order you to lay to."

"You fired on me, sir, and that angered me."

"Had you fired over me, I should have obeyed; but any vessel afloat is entitled to courtesy, and as you failed to give me my rights, I defied you, and, by Heaven, I'd have let you sink my schooner before I would have come to for you!"

"Now, sir, what is your pleasure, for I have business to attend to if I am not under arrest."

There was something so bold, so manly in the

bearing of the young coaster, that all were impressed with him and turning to the lieutenant and the middy, Captain Spruel said:

"I shall put you in irons, sir, haul your vessel alongside of the Government wharf and discharge her cargo, for I am confident your bold air hides villainy."

"All right, sir," said Mark Mountjoy, "and if you find nothing, if my crew prove that you have wronged me, and I get quit-papers, then you shall be personally responsible to me for your acts, for there is something behind your duty in this persecution of me, and you well know it. Now, sir, I am ready to go into irons."

All started, for such language from a skipper of a coaster to the captain of a vessel-of-war had never been heard before by those present.

"Ha! do you dare threaten me?" shouted Captain Spruel.

"I dare tell you, that in your capacity as an officer, you have insulted and dishonored me, and as a man I shall make you personally responsible," and Mountjoy turned and held forth his wrists for the irons, which a seaman just then brought forward.

They went on with a snap, and the boats of the Vidette were signaled to tow the Winged Arrow into the Government dock.

Then the search was begun, while the town was excited over the rumor that there had been a smuggler captured loaded with contraband goods.

Every article on board the schooner was taken out, and the closest search made for secret receptacles where contraband goods could be concealed; but not anything was found, and the merchants who were the agents of Mark Mountjoy came forward and reported that they thought a great wrong had been done.

To the port commandant Captain Spruel made a report that seemed satisfactory to that officer, and he only said:

"Be more careful next time, Captain Spruel, and tell your informant that he certainly must not again place you in a false position."

"Then the schooner is to be released, sir?"

"Yes, at once."

"And her captain?"

"Goes free, of course."

"May I not try a trick, sir, to entrap this fellow?"

"You believe him guilty, then?"

"I am sure of it."

"What are your reasons?"

"You know who my informant is, and he is very sure to be right."

"I agree with you there; but he has been wrong in this case."

"I believe the fellow has goods concealed on board, and is to deliver them at sea."

"But his crew?"

"They are in with him, of course."

"Well, what is it you wish to do?"

"He sails from here back to Salem, and always leaves at night, I hear, so I desire to try a plan to catch him."

"Ashore?"

"I will leave my vessel here, and take a small craft and twenty men, running down to the Isles of Shoals, for that is the smugglers' rendezvous."

"There, sir, I will await his coming out, signal him, and pretend to be a smuggler with a cargo to send in, and my word for it, I'll catch him."

"Very well, do as you deem best, Spruel; but since I have talked with Mountjoy I feel that you have wronged him, though of course you only did what you deemed your duty."

"How was it, by the way, that you fired on him before you sent a shot to bring him to?"

"My bad marksmanship, sir, for I fired the gun."

"It struck him instead of going over him as I intended," and the face of the young officer flushed, as though ashamed at the story he was telling.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SEA TRAP.

THE Winged Arrow was released from imprisonment, and the irons were knocked off of the wrists of her handsome young skipper.

The freight taken from the hold was carted into town, and the schooner was towed to the wharf where she always loaded when in port.

Her agents were provoked at Captain Spruel, and wondered at his seeming persecution of Mark Mountjoy, for they had always found the young commander of the Vidette a very nice fellow.

The Vidette was in special service as a coast-guard vessel, doing the duty that the revenue-cutters do to-day, and her cruising ground was from Portland, Maine, to Montauk Point at the entrance of Long Island Sound.

She had rendered most valuable service in the two years she had been on duty, and Captain Spruel and his officers were favorites in each port where they anchored, and especially in Salem and Portsmouth, where the cutter spent most of her time when not cruising.

This bold act of Captain Fred Spruel in the determined hunt of the Winged Arrow, was not understood by his friends.

Anxious to clear himself of having done an intentional wrong, the young captain declined

the invitations sent him for dinners and evening parties, pretending to be on the sick-list, and went out of port that night on a small chebacca boat, such as were used by the hardy coast fishermen in those days.

He carried with him a dozen seamen, eight marines and officers, and two midshipmen.

A twelve-pound gun had been taken on board the little vessel, and ten days' provisions.

Not wishing to be seen hovering about the Isles of Shoals by day, Captain Spruel ran his little craft into Rye Inlet and there passed the day, leaving the anchorage at sunset the next day and heading directly for the lee of Star Island, the southerly one of the Isles of Shoals.

It was expected that the Winged Arrow would come out that night from Portsmouth, and, if she had a rendezvous at the Isle of Shoals with any vessel, the captain would discover it.

If no craft came there to meet her, and she landed smuggled goods on the islands, to lie hidden there until others came for them, the fact would be known to those watching.

The topmast of the little vessel had been hauled, and she lay at single anchor, ready to get under way in a minute's time.

It was starlight, and toward midnight the lookout aloft sung out:

"Sail ho!"

"Ay, ay, where is she?"

"Just off Concord Point, sir, going about on the starboard tack."

"Ay, ay, keep a close watch on her and report."

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the lookout, and soon after he hailed the deck again.

"She is heading, sir, on a course that will bring her close in to this island."

"Ay, ay, how is the wind?" asked Captain Spruel.

"Right out of the southward, sir."

"Yes, he stood out of Portsmouth Harbor on his first tack, and headed in on his next under Concord Point."

"If he had not been coming to these islands, he would have held his first tack leagues out to sea and left these isles far away on his starboard, fetching Plum Island in his next."

"That is the schooner, is it not?"

"Yes, sir, it's the Winged Arrow," answered the lookout, for he had a fine night sea glass.

"The captain seems determined to make the schooner out a smuggler, Buckley, for I see no reason why he should not run the coast by short tacks, and that would fetch him near here," said a middy to the marine officer.

"The captain has some motive for what he does we don't know I guess," was the answer.

The schooner was now well in sight, and the little boat was gotten ready to spring upon her prey.

As the stranger came nearer she shot out from behind Star Island, and her topmast was sent aloft, while she began to signal in a strange way.

The schooner still held on, paying no attention to the signaling.

Then, as the chebacca boat headed so as to cross her bows, she suddenly put her helm down and went about as though to run.

"Throw a shot over him, Mr. Truett," cried the captain.

The twelve-pounder, already loaded, was at once fired, and the shot flew over the schooner. But she paid no attention to it, still holding on her course, as though to run to the northward of the Isles of Shoals and thus get open sea-room for a flight.

"Try another shot, sir."

A second shot was fired and the schooner still held on.

"At him this time, Mr. Truett."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the gun was well-aimed, for the bowsprit of the schooner was cut away and she came to.

There seemed to be a momentary excitement on board, and then, as the chebacca boat bore down upon her there came two bright flashes from her side, two deep reports, followed by a volley of musketry, and the chebacca boat was hit hard.

"She is armed, by all the powers!" yelled Captain Spruel, and he saw several of his men upon the deck dead and wounded. "We must carry her by boarding."

"Run her aboard, helmsman!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I knew I was right, Truett, and that the craft was a smuggler, yes, a pirate."

"Stand by, men, to board!"

Then came another fire from the schooner, which lay broadside to, and it also hit hard.

The chebacca boat's helmsman was killed, and the little craft lost her headway, for Captain Spruel sprung to the gun.

This he fired, double-shotted, and the crash of the iron on the schooner was distinctly heard, followed by cries and groans.

"Don't mind their iron, men, but give it to them again!" cried a voice heard on board the chebacca boat, and they all recognized it as Mark Mountjoy's.

Then the two guns on the schooner, and the one on the little craft, were fired rapidly, while the latter still neared the Winged Arrow, intending to board.

"It is lucky I brought a good crew," said Captain Spruel, as he prepared to lead his boarders.

But almost as he spoke another double fire came from the schooner, and the marine officer fell dead, one of the middies near was wounded, and several of the men were cut down.

The next instant the two boats came together with a crash, and Captain Spruel sprung on board the schooner, cutlass in hand.

But, suddenly he was confronted by Mark Mountjoy, also armed with a cutlass, and in an instant the naval officer was disarmed.

"You are my prisoner, sir!" came in Mark Mountjoy's ringing voice, as he disarmed the naval officer.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SAD MISTAKE.

"My God! Captain Spruel, can this be you?" cried Mark Mountjoy, in a tone of horror, as he beheld the naval officer by the light of the lanterns.

"Yes, Mark Mountjoy, it is I, and you'll hang for this night's work," was the savage response of the naval officer.

"My dear sir, let me understand you, for in my mind you are the one to hang, wearing the rank of a naval commander and boarding an honest coaster as you have," returned Mark Mountjoy.

The situation was a strange one, and a startling one as well.

The moment Mark Mountjoy had disarmed Captain Spruel the attack and resistance had ceased.

The boarders saw that they were met by a force fully their equal and all well armed.

Those who were the defenders of the schooner at once lowered their weapons to await orders from their captain.

"Do you dare accuse me of improper motives?" cried Captain Spruel, and he glared upon the young coaster.

The latter laughed lightly and said:

"You command the coast-guard cruiser Vidette; I left your vessel in the harbor of Portsmouth, and, in a very suspicious locality for pirates and smugglers, I discovered a vessel coming out from behind an island, chasing me, firing on me, and I determine to resist to the bitter end, as I happen to be blessed this trip with several very plucky passengers and a guard of soldiers going to Boston."

"Now, sir, it is in order for you to explain your piratical attack upon me, and that is the situation in a nutshell."

Fred Spruel was nearly suffocating with his intense emotion. He could not believe that he had made a mistake, and so he blurted out:

"Passengers and marines be blown! Your crew are pirates."

Then one of the party stepped forward, cutlass in hand, and said pleasantly:

"Captain Spruel, I believe?"

"That is my name, sir," was the almost fierce reply.

"Permit me to introduce myself—Lieutenant Herbert Deering, of the First Artillery, en route by this craft to Boston in command of a detachment of my men and two pieces of light artillery."

Fred Spruel had heard of Lieutenant Herbert Deering, as a young aristocrat, rich, handsome and a general favorite.

Could he, Lieutenant Frederick Spruel, acting captain in the Navy of the United States, have made a fearful blunder?

There before him, now revealed in his officer's uniform, was the artillery lieutenant, and behind him were a dozen soldiers.

Could it be a trick of the young coaster to escape him, or was it all as it appeared?

He must make the best of his situation, so he said:

"Pardon me, sir, but let me state my position and we can see if things are as represented, for I must doubt until assured."

"I shall be glad to hear, sir, if you can explain what now appears to me to be a very awkward situation," was the reply.

"I have cause for believing this craft to be a smuggler, and I followed her out of Salem, and she refused to come to at my fire."

"I heard of this, sir, in the town."

"I searched her on arriving in port but found nothing unlawful on board; but still suspecting her captain, I decided to convince myself, so with this craft and a score of my men, came here to lie in wait for her, feeling that she would meet some fellow smuggling craft about these islands."

"As she was standing directly for Star Island, I felt sure that she was going to land and hide there pirate booty or smuggled goods which she had in some secret place aboard her."

"I fired to bring you to, and you ran from me, then returned my fire, and naturally not knowing she was armed, I believed her to have developed into a full-fledged pirate."

"I understand your position, sir, and regret it, for I fear it will get you into trouble, as a passenger, two of my men and one of the schooner's crew have been killed, and several wounded."

"Let me ask, sir, why Lieutenant Deering is

on board this craft with a detachment of his men and two guns?" asked Captain Spruel, still suspicious.

"When stationed in Boston, sir, the First Light Artillery made many friends, and the ladies have made for the command a full set of colors, and I was deputized by the colonel, with two gun squads and those pieces of light artillery which we used upon you to-night, sir, to go and receive the very elegant souvenir from our friends."

"Did the port commandant know of this?"

"No, sir, for we arrived in Portsmouth just in time to learn of the sailing of the schooner, so came on board at once."

Captain Spruel was not one to yield gracefully, and he still hesitated, while Lieutenant Deering, wishing no trouble with a brother officer that could be avoided, was anxious to do all he could to convince him by moderate means that he stood in a false position, so said:

"I think the situation is plain enough, Captain Spruel."

"Here I am, with my men, there are my two pieces of light artillery, we are all in uniform and came on board this vessel to go to Boston, where Captain Mountjoy was going to take us after touching at Salem."

"We saw your vessel, mistook her for a smuggler, then for a coast pirate, and Captain Mountjoy decided to fight her with my consent, which I readily acquiesced in, as did also the half-dozen passengers he had on board."

"Permit one of them, to whom Captain Spruel is known, to guarantee that this is no trick of this gallant young skipper," and one of the passengers stepped forward.

"Mr. Larkin," said Captain Spruel, recognizing the passenger as a well-known merchant of Portsmouth.

"Yes, sir, and I am afraid you have made a grave error in this affair," said Mr. Larkin.

"Yes, but he fired upon me, and—"

"I have a right, sir, to protect my vessel from any craft I believe an outlaw, and you certainly gave no sign that you were sailing under false colors in discharge of what you deemed your duty."

"This is another score, Captain Spruel, to be settled between us," were the cutting words of Mark Mountjoy.

"Never fear, sir, but I am willing to pay all debts I owe," returned the captain angrily.

"Then, sir, you owe it to me to at once leave my vessel and no longer detain my passengers."

"My home is in Salem, and if I do not hear from you, sir, within two weeks, you shall hear from me, for I am not one to submit to the insults which you have heaped upon me, Captain Spruel."

"All hands ahoy! to get under way."

Lieutenant Deering and the passengers, as also the soldiers, gazed at Mark Mountjoy with surprise, not unmixed with admiration, to hear him speak thus to the commander of a cruiser.

The lieutenant had been particularly struck with the young coaster when he had first seen him on his vessel, and admired his seamanship and nerve.

He had had yielded readily when Mark had told him he could rig a platform and fire the guns over the bulwarks, and they could whip off, or capture the vessel they deemed an outlaw.

To the young skipper he had yielded full command, and he saw that he was no ordinary personage, but a man of education, refinement and ability.

The half-dozen male passengers had also decided to fight, and Mark Mountjoy had shown himself fully equal to taking care of his vessel and it did not take Fred Spruel long to discover that he would have been readily worsted, while his pride had a fall in being disarmed by the coaster captain, when he was voted the finest swordsman in the service.

"I will retire, sir, and allow you to go on your way; but were it not for the presence of Lieutenant Deering and his passengers, I would take you back to port with me."

"Under what charge, sir?"

A muttered oath was the only response of the irate captain, who retired from the schooner convinced that he had made a very sad mistake, and carrying with him the dead and wounded from the Winged Arrow, which at once spread sail, her crew having repaired damages, and headed away on her southward run.

"I fear I made a sad mistake," was the confession which Captain Spruel made to himself, as he sought the port commandant, after an early breakfast the next morning to make his report of the affair.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE REPORT.

THE port commandant, Port-Captain Hunnewell, was a very just man and an excellent officer, who had won his rank by hard fighting in the War of the Revolution.

He commanded the coast-line from Boston to the Penobscot River, with the squadron reporting at Portland and Portsmouth and the coast-guard vessels then on duty as revenue cutters.

He was growing gray in the service, had laid up a snug fortune from prize-money and was

calmly awaiting promotion to a commodoreship, after which he wished to retire, leaving history to remember him as Commodore Hunnewell.

He had one child, a lovely daughter, in whom his whole life was wrapped up, and the existence also, it seemed, of a score of young officers of the navy and army, not to speak of any number of young merchants.

But if Grace Hunnewell had a preference she had not shown it thus far to any great extent, though her father had certainly picked out for her a husband in Fred Spruel, who would soon be, though under thirty, a captain, and was then in command, as such, of as fine a cruiser as floated the seas, for the Vidette was the perfection of a naval vessel of the smaller class.

Then, too, Fred Spruel had inherited a fortune, and that was also in his favor, while he was a handsome fellow, was known to be a good officer, and had distinguished himself on more than one occasion.

The captain and his daughter were just finishing a breakfast when the name of Captain Fred Spruel was brought in.

It was a cozy home, that of the port captain, with every comfort about it, and the fair young mistress of which—for the captain was a widower—was certainly a beauty, deservedly the belle that she was acknowledged to be in the town.

Her form was willowy, and her hair of a golden red, while her eyes were large, intensely black, and shaded by the longest of lashes, that gave them the dreamy look of a Spanish maiden.

"Now we will know if that handsome young coaster is really a pirate or not, for Spruel has news, to call so early."

"Has Captain Spruel been pirate-hunting again, father?" asked Grace.

"Yes, he has been after that bold fellow whom he chased into port, and who would not come to at his command, because he fired on him instead of over him."

"The captain is convinced the young skipper is a smuggler, but I cannot doubt a man with his fine face—Ah, Spruel, good-morning."

"Sit down and have some breakfast with us."

"Thank you, captain, but I have breakfasted."

"Miss Hunnewell, I hope you are well," and Captain Spruel took a seat near the commandant, who responded:

"You look pale and worried, Spruel; nothing has gone wrong, I hope?"

"Yes, sir—Nay, do not run off, Miss Hunnewell, for what I have to report will soon be town talk as it is."

"Ah! you have then made a mistake, captain," and Captain Hunnewell motioned to Grace to remain, which she appeared willing to do, so resumed her seat.

"Yes, sir, I made a sad mistake, though whether the man is really a pirate or not I do not know, and yet believe he is, for he is as ready with his guns as an old commander."

"Ah! his guns? was he armed, and did he fire upon you?"

"He did fire upon me, sir; but let me give you the facts of the case as they occurred," and, minding nothing, Fred Spruel began his story at his securing the chebacca boat and arming and manning her.

He was sure from the tacks made by the schooner that she was running down to Star Island to hide booty, or had seen him and expected to find a confederate in him.

Then he told of the fight, even to his being disarmed by Mark Mountjoy, and added:

"That fellow is either a superb swordsman, Captain Hunnewell, or caught me at a disadvantage."

"He must be, Spruel, to have disarmed the best swordsman in the navy."

"I believe it was an accident, sir, for I could not understand how it was done, the trick, if it was a trick; but I shall have an opportunity to know, for he will challenge me."

"Challenge you? A coaster skipper challenge a naval officer?" said Grace with surprise.

"Yes, Miss Grace, and he is as little like a common coaster as can be."

"He looks the gentleman, and I believe is the son of a clergyman, and was once in the navy."

"Indeed! but to your story, Spruel," said the port captain.

"There is little more to tell, sir, for we met, and I got worsted, while I fear the presence on board of Lieutenant Deering and his men will prevent his being punished."

"I cannot see that he merits punishment, Captain Spruel, for believing you to be an outlaw he beat you off."

"I heard last night from Lieutenant Deering, by a note regretting he had not time to pay his respects, as he was to go at once to Boston, and I regretted it, as I knew his father well, and have heard splendid reports of his son."

"But, captain, the family of this dead passenger will demand an investigation, while, on account of your men, and Deering's, who were killed, I must investigate the affair, though, of course, I take your report as the correct one."

"It was a sad, an unfortunate mistake, and were I not most friendly to you, might lose you your ship."

"But you must put your report in writing, and I shall take the testimony also of the officer with you, and your men, and then you must get to sea, cruising between here and Boston, so I will know where to find you with a dispatch-boat, if you are needed."

"I regret this affair, but I will endeavor to show that the mistake on your part was from zeal in your duty."

"But you must send no challenge to this coaster, Mountjoy."

"Egad, sir, he will challenge me, and in fact has already done so, or threatened me that I should answer to him for my acts."

"Well, avoid a meeting if possible, for we have had enough of this affair."

"Now go with me to my quarters," and the two left the mansion together, and the middy and the men who were on board the chebacca boat with Fred Spruel were sent for and their testimony taken.

Captain Spruel was then told to sail for Boston at once, see Lieutenant Deering and get his report of the affair, which was to be sent by special messenger to the commandant at Portsmouth.

That same evening, leaving considerable excitement in the town over the affair, Captain Spruel setsail for Boston, crowding his vessel with canvas in the hope that, as the Winged Arrow had to put in at Salem, she would catch her before she reached her destination.

"That fellow is secretly a pirate, and I'll catch him and hang him yet," he said to himself as he paced his quarter-deck in no good humor with himself or the world.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STORM.

THE bold stand taken by Mark Mountjoy, during the attack upon his vessel by Captain Spruel, certainly raised that young sailor in the opinion of his passengers, principal among whom was Lieutenant Herbert Deering.

His crew having seen what he dared do, in his flight from the cruiser in the run to Portsmouth, were more than ever pleased to be under his command, and were ready to execute any order he would give.

The artillery officer did all in his power to help him get his vessel shipshape once more, and when she was standing away again on her interrupted tack, he said pleasantly:

"You are a bold man, Captain Mountjoy, and I congratulate you upon what proved a victory for you, though I fear you have made a bitter foe in Captain Spruel."

"Thank you for your kind words, Lieutenant Deering; but as for Captain Spruel I am sure he has some sinister motive in his action toward me, though what it is I cannot fathom."

"You bearded the lion in his den surely."

"I simply asserted my manhood, sir, and I am ready to risk death in so good a cause, at any time."

"As you have seemed friendly toward me, lieutenant, I will tell you that I was born and reared a gentleman, have held a commission in our navy, and lost it by my own wayward career."

"I am now trying to earn a living for myself and wife, who is at our home in Salem, and yet I find that I have some secret enemy who has plotted against me time and again."

"My wife is a lady born, the daughter of a Southern planter. No woman is more accomplished. We have a cozy little home, but no one notices us in Salem and I am given the cold shoulder by many, where I am sure nothing is known against us to cause this."

"Captain Spruel followed me to sea, instigated, I am sure, by my secret foe, whoever he may be, and when he fired on my vessel, instead of over her, to bring me to, I would have let him sink her before I would have obeyed his orders from the cannon's mouth."

"Not content, sir, with searching my vessel in port, he laid a trap in which he hoped to catch me, but got entrapped himself, as it may go hard with him."

"I thank you, Mountjoy, for your confidence and appreciate it; but I hope you will be able to discover who this secret foe is, for one cannot well defend himself from an assassin, as it were, one who strikes in the dark."

"I shall find out, sir, if in my power."

"As to Captain Spruel, he has a great deal of influence, and this attack on your vessel will be set down to his having been over-zealous to do his duty."

"It may be smoothed over, sir, by the Government, but I shall not forget his insults to me."

"You surely do not intend to hold him responsible—that is, make it a personal affair between you as you hinted, in fact threatened him you would do?"

"I certainly shall do so, for he insulted me grossly and for it he shall answer. If he refuses to resent my words to him, then I shall demand reparation of him."

"You are a man I admire, Captain Mountjoy, and we must be friends."

"Now I will seek my berth, for I am tired, and you seem to have no need of my services;

but should you do so, pray do not hesitate to command me."

The dashing young artillery officer then retired to the cabin for the remainder of the night; but when he arose to breakfast he found the sea rough, and the schooner under reefed canvas was dashing along at a great pace, for she had run into some nasty weather.

All day long the weather gradually grew worse, until at nightfall a terrible gale was blowing, the seas were like miniature mountains, and the Winged Arrow, under forestay-sail and mainsail reefed down was staggering along in a way that made the soldiers wish they had walked all the way to Boston, or that they had not started on their mission, to accept the honor intended for them.

"We must lay to, if this gale grows stronger," said Mark Mountjoy to his mate, and as he spoke there came a wild cry for help and a man was swept into the sea.

"Great God! it is the lieutenant, and he was thrown against the bulwark and stunned," shouted a seaman forward.

"Put about! run to leeward of me and come to with life-lines ready to throw!"

The order was given to the mate, and ere the lieutenant was twenty feet from the schooner's stern, Mark Mountjoy had cast aside his coat, uttered the command to his mate and leaped into the sea.

The mate of the schooner was a perfect seaman, cool in danger and fearless.

He would have checked the daring act of his captain could he have done so; but as he did not, he at once called the crew to action, and the schooner was almost instantly put around in spite of the terrific seas that swept her decks.

The passengers and soldiers, in terror, crouched wherever they could find safety and helplessly gazed on.

They saw the noble vessel fall off before the gale, and go tearing along at a desperate pace, while the huge seas seemed about to curl down upon her decks as they rushed astern of her.

The mate himself had the wheel, and each seaman was at his post, silent, eager and determined.

"Schooner, ahoy! ho, the Arrow!" came from the black mass ahead, and the clear, calm voice of Mark Mountjoy was recognized.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the mate, in even, ringing tones.

"I have him! Bear to starboard, pass me and lay to, with life—"

"Ay, ay, sir," shouted the mate, as the voice of his captain was drowned by a wave, while the schooner drove by like the very gale itself.

Half a score on the schooner beheld, in the lurid light of the waves, the daring captain, and they saw, too, that he upheld a form in his arms.

"Stand by, all! Ready, about!"

"Well done, my beauty! Stand by all with life-lines! Steady!"

The orders came from the mate as he put the schooner round, and all watched the result, while a cheer broke from the crew as the beautiful craft lay to, riding the waves like a duck, and directly in the course that the gale must drive the bold rescuer and the rescued.

"Together, all of you—cheer!"

At the mate's command a wild cheer went up from all, and above the howling gale came the response they had hoped for:

"Ay, ay! stand by with your lines!"

Then in the darkness was seen the rescuer and the one he sought to save, and the lines were thrown.

The waters had revived the stunned officer, and a splendid swimmer, he also grasped a line as Mark Mountjoy did, and they swept sternward, under the lee of the schooner's stern were brought up with a sudden pull, and then strong arms drew them on board, amid a wild cheer, which ended in a yell of joy from all.

"It was a close call, sir, and I congratulate you," said the mate to the young officer.

"It was the deed of a hero, of the bravest of men, to rescue me, and God knows my heart is yours, Mark Mountjoy," said Herbert Deering, with an emotion he could not conceal.

"No other would have dared attempt it, sir," said a passenger, with enthusiasm.

"I've had practice at just such work, so it came easy," was the offhand remark of Mountjoy, and he added:

"But come, lieutenant, that was a hard blow you got, to stun you as it did, and you need to splice the main-brace with me, and change your clothes," and he led the officer into the cabin.

When they appeared on deck half an hour after, the gale had abated somewhat, and the schooner was put on her course once more, as soon as her young captain felt that it would be safe to do so, and by dawn she passed out of the circle of the storm into comparatively smooth waters, and under a fair breeze went skimming along toward Salem, with Thatcher's Island just in sight abeam.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SECRET FOE.

As Lieutenant Herbert Deering was anxious to reach Boston, and the passengers on board

were willing for a short delay, when Mark Mountjoy said he would land them in Salem with as little delay as possible, the course was laid to the southwest from Thatcher's Island for Boston Light.

The wind was from the northeast, blowing fresh, and the Winged Arrow went along at a speed that was the admiration of all on board.

Boston Light came in view soon after dark, and the run into the harbor was quickly made and the schooner ran alongside of the Government Dock.

"My dear friend Mountjoy, we part now, but I assure you that you carry my life-long friendship, and whenever I can serve you in any way I know you will call upon me."

"You are most kind, Lieutenant Deering, and all I would ask of you is your report in this affair as it occurred, for I do not care for trouble, and where those in authority would take the word of a naval officer against that of a coast skipper, such as I am, your word, as an army lieutenant, not to speak of yourself, would have great weight," returned Mark Mountjoy, as he stood with the army officer on the wharf, as the last of the soldiers and their traps were coming ashore.

"I shall make my report at once and send it to Commandant Hunnewell at Portsmouth, for to him of course Spruel will make his report; but all are ashore, so I will not detain you."

"Good-by, and my friendship go with you, and expect to see me in Salem soon, for I shall run down on leave to visit an old aunt, whose heir I am, and who lives there."

He grasped Mark's hand as he spoke, and springing back upon his deck the coaster gave the order to cast off, and the Winged Arrow at once began to move out of the harbor.

"Our skipper's luck," said one of the men, as he pointed to the sea, and another added:

"Yes, the wind was fair for us here, switched around while we were at the wharf and now comes out of the southeast strong, so we can run home as soon as we get outside," added another of the men.

The passengers retired to their bunks, after leaving Boston, and Mark took the wheel until Boston Light was left astern, and then left the mate in charge to seek much-needed rest.

When he awoke the Winged Arrow was gliding past his own home on the shore of Salem Harbor, and the sun was shining brightly.

His wife stood on the porch waving to the schooner, which she so well knew, and which she had been most anxious about, for the rumor had gone about that the Vidette had gone off in chase of the Winged Whale, whose captain had been caught smuggling.

It was just what all had expected, was the almost universal remark of the gossips, for no one knew anything about "those Mountjoys," and they were "too good looking to be honest folks, and put on too many airs."

These ugly remarks had reached the ears of Alma Mountjoy, and glad was her heart when she sighted the schooner coming up the harbor.

There could be no mistake about it, she was not under the control of the Vidette's crew, for there floated her husband's flag at the fore, a blue field with a gold arrow in the center, the feathers of the arrow being in the shape of a bird's wings.

And more, Alma recognized the tall, splendid form of her husband as he stood on deck and waved to him, the salute being returned by dipping the arrow flag.

Up to her anchorage glided the schooner, and people looked and wondered.

Where was the Vidette?

Why had not the Winged Arrow a crew from the cruiser in charge?

Certainly the Vidette had gone off in hot chase, and incoming vessels had reported the vessel-of-war as firing on the schooner, which was in full flight.

Now, as though to give the gossips a slap in the face, the Winged Arrow returns to her wharfein Salem and her young skipper, leaving his mate to discharge the freight, walks coolly up to his agent, ignoring the curious crowd that had gathered on the docks to see what it all meant.

"Well, Captain Mountjoy, I did not expect to see you back again from all reports," said the agent as Mark entered the office.

"And why, sir, may I ask?"

"On account of your having been pursued to sea by the Vidette, and charged with smuggling which I know to be all bosh."

"Captain Spruel made a mistake, sir, that is all, and I think he has placed himself in a still more awkward position."

"But I wish to report return, sir, a day overdue, but then I met with a delay off the Isles of Shoals, and again from going to Boston to land an officer and detachment of soldiers."

"I have a good cargo, and my mate is in charge; but should I be wanted, you will find me at home."

So saying Mark Mountjoy left the office and wended his way homeward, while the agent remarked to a clerk:

"That fellow is as proud as Lucifer, and I can be more friendly with the commander of a frigate than I can be with him; but he has had

trouble, that is certain, and I must get out of the mate just what it is," and the agent moved away toward the wharf where the Winged Arrow lay discharging her cargo.

Her torn sails, newly patched, temporary bowsprit and other marks indicated that she had been under a hot fire; but the passengers had landed and gone to attend to the business that brought them there, and the mate and seamen were quietly attending to their work, all unconscious of the crowds gazing at them, and unmindful of the questions put to them regarding their cruise.

The agent entered the cabin, accompanied by the mate, and soon learned the whole story.

"That captain of yours is a very devil, mate, when aroused, and yet as courtly as a prince in his bearing."

"He was utterly unconcerned it seemed to me, and told me nothing of the affair, and if he has said it, he will keep his word and make Captain Spruel answer for what he did."

"You may be sure of it, sir," was the mate's answer.

In the mean time Mark Mountjoy had walked rapidly on toward his cottage home.

It was a pretty place, standing back in a flower garden, and not a hundred feet from the waters of the harbor, the very home for a young sailor.

Alma, looking very beautiful stood at the gate to welcome him, and the nurse with his pretty twin children greeted him at the door.

But Alma's quick eyes told her that something had gone wrong with her husband, and as soon as breakfast was over she led him out into the rustic arbor in the garden.

"What is it, Mark?" she said softly, gazing into the face of the man in whom her whole life and soul was wrapped up.

"Ah, Alma, your keen eyes have seen that something has gone wrong, and you are right," he said with a smile and then he told her all, adding:

"I am sure that Spruel has been set on to this by some one in the town, and that some one is our, or my secret foe, and I can look to him for my treatment received by the people."

"Now I must find out just who this secret foe is."

"I think I can tell you, Mark, though do not act hastily."

"You can tell me?"

"Yes, for a gentleman called here soon after you sailed, said that you had been suspected of smuggling and that the Vidette had sailed in chase of you, and the result would be your arrest and imprisonment, and asked me, as he supposed I would not care to live here longer, to sell him this place."

"He seemed to know so much that I sent the nurse down town to see what she could find out, and no one else appeared to know any thing, other than that the cruiser had followed you to sea."

"And who was this gentleman who was so sure of my imprisonment?" asked Mark Mountjoy.

"That I do not know, but I can describe him and you will be able to find him out," was Alma's answer, and she added:

"He is a fine looking man past thirty, dresses very stylishly and wears considerable jewelry, for I noticed a watch-chain and handsome watch, which he several times took out to look at, as though to impress me with it."

"Then he wore two rings, a scarf-pin, ruffled shirt and cuffs."

"I will keep watch for just such a man, Alma," said Mark Mountjoy.

CHAPTER XXI.

MASTER AND MAN.

THE firm of Vail & Company were daily becoming richer and richer.

Their main house was in G—, on the coast, but they had branch offices in Boston and Salem, under competent agents.

Captain Vail was not a man to spend his time in command of a whaler, when he could enjoy a life of luxury at home, so he passed most of his time at his elegant house in G—, making monthly visits to his other houses.

He had been in Salem when the Winged Arrow sailed, with the Vidette in chase, and he had remained longer than was his wont, stopping at the Salem Inn, which was well kept, and had been handed down like an heirloom, from father to son for several generations.

Captain Vail sat in his pleasant rooms at the inn, enjoying his breakfast, which was a very substantial affair, for the merchant sailor was a *bon vivant*, and he was smiling contentedly to himself, for with him all was prosperous.

He had decided to go more largely into the whaling business, and had sent an agent to purchase several large and fine vessels, which were to be equipped and sent to join the large fleet then at the whaling grounds, and among which were two of his own ships.

"I am growing rich rapidly, in fact I may say I am trebly as well off as I was when my father left me his fortune."

"Well, she threw me aside, loved that fellow,

Mountjoy, and married that infernal old miser, Peter Rutledge, and now is living the life of a prisoner in his gloomy old rookery.

"So be it, he cannot live always, and I'll be able to double his fortune and again offer her my hand when she is a widow, for I still love her, and always will.

"But Mountjoy's career must be settled first, and I guess it is about ended in a prison by this time—Come in!"

The door opened in answer to his call, and in walked Justin Laws, the confidential clerk of Vail & Co.

Justin Laws was a small man, smooth-faced, with the air of a parson's clerk, and he had a habit of rubbing his hands together like one in agony all the time.

But he was not a sufferer, and his landlady, good Mistress Swett was willing to avow that Justin Laws could eat more at a single sitting than any other three of her boarders.

Mr. Justin Laws was ambitious to make money, and out of his salary had saved up quite a sum, but of this he kept his own counsel.

Since Captain Vail had raised his salary he had put on more airs, and several times had been known to treat to a glass of ale or grog at the inn, a surprise that his fellow clerks could not get over.

"Well, Mr. Laws, what is the news?" asked Captain Vail, convinced that something out of the usual run had caused his clerk to visit him at his rooms.

Mr. Laws came forward, rubbing his hands as usual, smiling like one who had a trap to spring, and pointed out of the window.

The captain sprung up and glanced down toward the water.

"What is it?"

"The schooner."

"Ha! there is the Winged Arrow."

"Yes, sir, at her dock."

"Why not at the Government dock?"

"She came back alone, sir."

"And the Vidette?"

"Has not returned."

"Where is she?"

"Don't know, sir."

"When did the Winged Arrow come in?"

"Half an hour ago, Captain Vail."

"She has a prize crew on board, of course?"

"Her own crew."

"And an officer from the Vidette in command?"

"No, Captain Vail, she has come back under her own skipper and his crew, and is discharging her freight at her agent's wharf."

"The deuce!"

"Yes, sir," said Justin Laws, not knowing exactly what to say.

"The Vidette certainly overhauled her."

"She is badly scarred up, sir, from shot-marks."

"Well, Laws, go and find out the truth about her return, and come to me in my office when you have done so."

"Yes, sir," and Mr. Laws cast a longing look at the breakfast-table.

"Have you breakfasted?"

"Only a cup of coffee, sir, as I saw the schooner coming, and hastened away to see what I could discover."

"Pull that bell-rope and sit down and eat breakfast," said Captain Vail, who was a very hospitable man; but had he seen what "only a cup of coffee" meant in Mr. Laws's estimation, he would have considered that he had certainly breakfasted, and wondered that the good Widow Swett did not charge him as twins.

Having laid in an extra foundation for work, Mr. Justin Laws sallied forth on his mission and a couple of hours afterward put in an appearance in the office of the senior member of the shipping firm of Vail & Company.

"Well?"

Mr. Laws had a smile on his face; he seemed to feel that the word was well uttered, for all was well, as far as his investigations were concerned.

Captain Vail saw that his man had news, so threw himself into a seat and motioned him to another.

"You have made some discovery, Laws?"

"I have, sir."

"Out with it."

"You know, sir, since our compact, that I was to serve you outside of the office work, I have been quite friendly with young Mabrey Manning?"

"Who is he?"

"The mate of the Winged Arrow, sir."

"Ah, yes; I recalled the name but not the man."

"Well?"

"I knew his mother, so on that account based our friendship, and as I am an elder in the Methodist church, I made bold to lend him some books, some that would purify the soul of man, and—"

"Curse your cant and hypocrisy, Laws, and tell me what you have done."

Justin Laws looked shocked, but he knew Ezra Vail, and so dropped his whine and continued:

"I went to see Mate Manning, sir, and found him very busy, but asked him, when he got at

leisure, to step up to the coffee-house and have a chop and glass of ale with me."

"Oh, Lord! did you eat a third breakfast, Laws?"

Mr. Laws looked hurt, but said:

"It was to draw him out, sir."

"You must have had to draw yourself out like a telescope to hold more; but go on."

"Ale and a chop, sir, are the things to make a man sociable, and I soon had Mabrey talking freely and I got it all."

"Got all what? His chop and ale, and yours, too?"

"Oh, no, sir; I got all the particulars."

"Ah, I see; and what are they?"

"The cruiser did not bring the Winged Arrow to."

"The deuce you say!"

"No, sir. Captain Mountjoy—"

"Don't call the mere master of a coasting craft captain, for he is but a skipper," said Ezra Vail, impatiently.

Justin Laws could see no difference in the right to the title; it was a distinction without a difference, as long as a man commanded a vessel and crew, be it a ten-tonner or a whale-ship.

But he did not argue and continued:

"Cap—Skipper Mountjoy was angry because Captain Spruel fired upon his vessel before he fired a shot to bring him to, and so held on in spite of a hot fire."

"He's a bold fellow."

"Yes, sir, that is just what he is, and he ran on to Portsmouth, dropped anchor in the harbor and there waited for the Vidette to come up with him."

"And she was seized?"

"Yes, sir, and stripped clean at the Government dock and nothing found on board that was lawless."

"This is strange, for I was sure that fellow was smuggling," said Captain Vail.

"She was released, sir, and then reloaded for Salem."

"She has secret lockers somewhere, in which the smuggled goods are stowed."

"They could not find them, sir, and so she was released and loaded for Salem; but got an unexpected lot of passengers in an army lieutenant, with some guns and soldiers, going to Boston."

"Captain Spruel set a trap to catch the Winged Arrow, by going with a crew in a small craft and lying off the Isles of Shoals, when he pounced upon the young skipper and got whipped off and taken himself."

"Then Mountjoy's fate is sealed!"

"No, sir, for the soldiers defended the Winged Arrow, not knowing the attacking party, and suspecting they were pirates, and Captain Spruel went back to Portsmouth, carrying the dead and wounded, and to report the very grave mistake he had made."

Captain Vail uttered an oath between his shut teeth, and then said almost fiercely:

"Justin Laws the end of this is not yet, and I rely upon you to aid me if you love gold."

"Go now, and let me think."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TWO OFFICERS.

THE Vidette and the Winged Arrow passed each other in the night, and in the darkness were not sighted.

Captain Fred Spruel was anxious to meet the little schooner, for he did not care to have Lieutenant Deering discuss the affair at the Isles of Shoals, but to make his report.

A fishing-smack reported to the commander of the Vidette that he knew the Winged Arrow well, had seen her, and she had stood on toward Boston, so Captain Spruel at once headed for that port, and in the darkness failed to meet the little vessel.

He ran into the harbor by day, and after coming to an anchor, at once went to the hotel where he was wont to put up when in town, and which was the resort of the young aristocrats of Boston.

He was greeted by many who knew him, and at once saw that something was going on out of the usual run.

"Grand ball to-night, Spruel, in honor of Herbert Deering, you know."

"A military affair, so of course you are going, as I'll send for an invitation for you," said a young aristocrat.

"I wanted to see Deering, but hardly think I shall attend the ball."

"Then you won't see him, for he is dining with the governor now, and goes from there to the ball, and at dawn sails for Portland with his men."

"This is a special affair to him from his old friends, gotten up on the spur of the moment, after the presentation of the colors, which you know about."

"I heard of it, yes; but is there any news?"

"None, more than that there was an attack on Deering's craft on the way here, by some naval officer, who I did not learn, and in a storm the lieutenant was stunned by a wave hurling him against the bulwarks, and he was washed overboard."

"How in Heaven's name did he escape, if he encountered the storm I did, and I suppose he must have."

"I had to lay to for thirty hours."

"Why the young skipper of the craft jumped overboard after him?"

"Nonsense."

"It is true, and we only wish we had the young skipper with us to-night, for Deering says he is a handsome fellow, and he certainly showed his pluck in beating off the craft that attacked him, and then going overboard after the lieutenant."

"Come, dine with me, and then go aboard ship, and rig out in your most gorgeous uniform, and go to the ball, for there will be scores of lovely women there."

"I'll go, thank you," and, three hours after, Captain Fred Spruel, looking very handsome in his full uniform, entered the ball-room with his friend, Field Woodford.

Field Woodford boasted of his family, was rich, handsome, a gentleman and a favorite, though a trifle fast.

It was not long before Herbert Deering, the guest of the evening, met Captain Spruel face to face.

He started slightly, looked surprised, and then said:

"I am glad to see you here, Captain Spruel."

"When did you reach port?"

Fred Spruel had waited for the army officer to speak, and as he did so pleasantly, he replied in the same manner:

"A few hours since, and I came particularly to see you."

"Indeed! and how can I serve you, Captain Spruel?"

"I made my report of that unfortunate affair, Lieutenant Deering, and suggested to the commandant that he should have yours also, and he requested me to ask you to send it at once by special messenger overland."

"I shall do so, and I only hope it will do you no harm, Captain Spruel; but let me tell you how that handsome, gallant young skipper saved my life—"

"I have heard, and I congratulate you," was the cold reply, and then the sailor added:

"It was not during the storm of course."

"It was, in the very hardest part of the blow."

"You could hardly have encountered the storm I did, for that craft you were on would not have lived through it; why, I had to lay to for thirty hours."

"We got it in all its fury; but the Winged Arrow is a splendid sea craft, and then Mountjoy is the finest sailor I ever met; but do you know aught regarding him, Captain Spruel, for to me he is a very remarkable man, and there seems to be some mystery about him."

Captain Spruel laughed almost rudely, and replied:

"I know only that he is accused of smuggling, and on the best of authority, while the mystery will be cleared up when I get him at the yard-arm of my vessel, for I have reason to believe that he is even worse than a smuggler."

The eyes of Lieutenant Herbert Deering flashed, and an angry retort seemed to spring to his lips.

But checking himself he said coldly:

"I can understand how you cannot admire him, Captain Spruel; but I do and he is my friend."

"I shall send the report to Commandant Hunnewell without fail."

"Good-night, Captain Spruel."

He walked away, and Fred Spruel felt uncomfortable.

"Curse the fellow, I believe he means that for a cut."

"When I have run down this pirate Mountjoy, he will apologize to me for his words and manner just now," and not wishing to remain longer where Herbert Deering was the guest of the evening, he pleaded official work to Field Woodford and went on board of his vessel in no very amiable frame of mind.

After the ball Herbert Deering went to his hotel, made out his official report of the affair at the Isles of Shoals, and dispatched it by special messenger to Portsmouth.

Then with his men he went on board of the Portland Packet, and left Boston behind him just as the sun rose above the horizon of the Atlantic.

The next morning Captain Fred Spruel discovered that the papers had the story of his attack upon the Winged Arrow, the midnight mail having brought full particulars, as known in Portsmouth.

"There is an evident desire here to put me in a false and ludicrous light, I see," he said, in an angry tone, and he opened a letter which had arrived on that morning by the mail-coach.

"By Heaven! a challenge from that coaster, Mark Mountjoy," he said, almost fiercely, as his eyes glanced at the contents of the letter he held in his hand.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHALLENGE.

THE letter which Mark Mountjoy had written to Captain Spruel of the Vidette, was not

exactly a challenge, though it might be so understood.

It had been written from Salem, the day before, and was as follows:

"ON BOARD SCHOONER WINGED ARROW,
SALEM HARBOR, SEPT. 10, 18—. }
TO CAPTAIN FREDERICK SPRUEL, COMMANDING U. S.
CUTTER VIDETTE:—

"SIR:—Convinced by your words and actions toward me that you have some secret, sinister motive in your unjust persecutions of me, I desire to know from you what cause of quarrel you have against me, and why, leaving to real smugglers and pirates to carry on their lawless work, you waste your services and time in endeavoring to prove an honest craft guilty of breaking the law?

"If you have aught against me that you wish satisfaction for, why not manfully demand it, and not attack my character, and with your crew and your guns at your back, play the part of a coward in your warfare against me.

"You have accused me before the world as a freebooter, and I have thrown the lie back in your face, so expect you to resent it.

"Should you consider my position in life too humble for you to challenge me, I shall resent the insult cast upon me in my own way.

"I will be at Salem for ten days.
Your obedient servant,
MARK MOUNTJOY."

Captain Fred Spruel was angry at first, when he read this letter, and then he was worried.

He did not wish to attract further attention to himself just then by a duel, and more, he was convinced that Mark Mountjoy was really a smuggler, if not a pirate.

He at last decided to seek one who could advise him, for he could not submit to being called a coward by the skipper of a coaster even.

If he could prove Mountjoy a smuggler, he would not have to meet him in a personal encounter.

So he went ashore and wended his steps to the Boston office of Ezra Vail & Company.

To his inquiry if Captain Vail was in the city, he was told that he was at G—.

That afternoon he set sail for G—, and upon arriving there the next day learned that Captain Vail had just started for Salem.

So to Salem the Vidette went, and running in by night, when the morning broke it was seen that she had dropped anchor close by the Winged Arrow.

This looked like design, but it was purely an accident, though a coincidence that the Vidette in running in should have steered clear of all the other vessels in port, and dropped anchor so near the schooner of Mark Mountjoy.

Anxious to see Captain Vail alone, the commander of the Vidette had gone ashore at an early hour and sent his name up to the merchant whaler at the tavern.

In a short while he was invited up to the pleasant rooms of Captain Vail, and breakfast for two was ordered.

"Well, captain, glad to see you; but it seems you slightly overdid the matter in your desire to catch Mountjoy," said Ezra Vail, and as he threw himself into an easy-chair, Fred Spruel asked quickly:

"What have you heard?"
"That he outran you to Portsmouth, after refusing to come to at your demand, and boldly received your fire."

"Yes, he did that; but what else?"
"You failed to find anything illegal on his craft."

"That was true, so what was to be done?"
"What did you do?"

"After all you told me I was convinced he was wrong, so I laid a trap for him."

"And got caught yourself."
"He's a clever sea-dog, Spruel, and I told you he would be hard to get to windward of," and Ezra Vail smiled.

"What have you heard, I asked you?" impatiently said Fred Spruel.

"That you went out to catch him off the Isles of Shoals, was taken for a pirate and got pretty badly whipped."

"It is not so, though I confess, but for the fact that I saw I had made a mistake, I would have been driven off."

"And what does old Hunnewell say about it?"
"I made my report, Lieutenant Deering has sent in his, and it will be laid aside for future reference, which means nothing will be done about it."

"I hope not, for your sake, for the laugh is upon you."

"And you got me into the scrape," was the angry retort.

"Pardon me, Spruel, but let us understand the situation of both of us, for I got you into no scrape."

"You vouched for it to me that this man was a smuggler, and that I would find contraband goods stowed beneath his decks."

"And I believe it."

"Acting upon this I pursued him, and boarded him when I found him in port, but found nothing."

"He had gotten the goods ashore."

"Not so, for he had not sent a boat ashore."

"Then some boat had come off to him."

"No, for I made every inquiry."

"How far ahead of you was he in the chase?"

"Leagues, for though the Vidette sails like a witch that fellow's craft beat her badly."

"Could he not have had a boat loaded and sent her off when near Isles of Shoals, or even sent a craft there, and you not seen her, for the report says the schooner arrived at night?"

"By Jove! I never thought of that."

"Then that was it without doubt."

"I begin to think so."

"Now how came you to make such a mistake as the attack on him off the Isles of Shoals?"

"Trusting in your word that you knew he had smuggled goods on board."

"There, you rap at me again, Captain Spruel."

"I think with justice."

"Permit me to do as I intended a moment ago, explain the situation."

"You owe me a large sum of borrowed money, in round figures, two thousand dollars, and I need it."

"Your duty is to hunt down smugglers, and when I asked you to pay me, you said if you could only get some prize-money you could."

"Then I suggested a plan."

"I told you that it was worth to me the amount you owed me, to capture a certain smuggler, and perhaps you would find him to be a pirate as well, and when he was imprisoned, or hanged, I would give you a receipt for the sum due me from you."

"I gave you my reasons for believing this man to be a smuggler, and you agreed with me that he must be an outlaw and were willing to undertake his capture."

"You failed to prove him such, and so the matter stands."

"I have not given up the chase yet, Ezra Vail, and the man's conduct toward me gives me another incentive to run him down."

"Ah! how is that?"

"What would you think of his challenging me for daring to accuse him of being a smuggler?"

"It would be just like him."

"And I suppose you think I should accept?"

"Well, as to that you are the best judge."

"But has he challenged you?"

"Here is his letter."

The merchant read it carefully, and said:

"Well, it is plain enough."

"Oh, yes; but if we can prove him to be a pirate or smuggler, I shall not have to meet him."

"Very true, and we must do it."

"How?"

"When does he sail?"

"In ten days from the writing of this letter."

"Then we have a week to work in."

"But we can prove nothing in that time."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Leave it to me, Spruel—leave it to me, for I will see that we get the proof of his being a smuggler," and the eyes of Ezra Vail glittered with a wicked light in them, as though he hated the man of whom he spoke with all his heart and soul.

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNDERHAND WORK.

AFTER having sent his letter to Captain Spruel, Mark Mountjoy felt sorry that he had done so.

"I should have waited to see what he meant to do," he muttered.

But it was too late to repine for what his indignation had caused him to do, so he could only take the consequences as they came.

His regular day of sailing was over a week off, and he was at his pretty home resting, and leaving his mate to get the schooner in perfect trim once more.

"Mark, there is a gentleman here to see you," said Alma, one morning after breakfast.

Mark went out upon the piazza and beheld a man whom he knew to be a clerk in a shipping house in town.

"I've called, captain, to see if you can run a small cargo for our house from Boston here?"

"My day of sailing is just a week off, sir."

"I know that, sir, but your mate said, as we were willing to give big pay, for it is a special order, and we have the boxes ready to send after the things, so the delay would not be much."

"When can I start?"

"We can get you the boxes aboard by night, sir."

"And I have to have them sent ashore and filled there?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long will it take?"

"A day, sir; and we will give double pay for the run, as it is a special one."

Mountjoy was silent a moment and then said:

"I'll go, so get your boxes ready, as soon as possible, and I will come down-town soon and see that the schooner is ready."

"Thank you, Captain Mountjoy; we appreciate your kindness, sir," and the man took his departure.

"Mark, I don't like that man's face—who is he?" asked Alma, when the visitor had gone.

"I believe his name is Laws, and he is clerk for Vail & Company."

"I would not trust a man with such a face."

"Why, he stands high here in the church, and is a good man, I believe, though, with you, Alma, I don't like his face; but now I must go down-town and get the Arrow ready for this run, for it will pay me well, and some day, my dear wife, I must make you rich again and give you as fine a home as you once had."

"Ah, Mark, I am happy with you, no matter if we were ever so poor," was the answer.

Mark Mountjoy found that Mate Manning had gotten the schooner in perfect trim once more, and she was soon hauled in alongside the wharf of Vail & Co. and the boxes to be sent to Boston to be packed and returned for shipment abroad, were being brought by carts to be put on board.

Mr. Laws was present, and after having seen that all was going well he wended his way back to the office.

Captain Vail was there, and entering the office Mr. Laws said:

"It's all right, sir."

"He agreed to go?"

"Yes, sir."

"And leaves when?"

"To-night, sir."

"And the other craft?"

"Sails from Marblehead as soon as I send word, sir."

"Then send word at once."

"Yes, sir," and Justin Laws disappeared.

Hardly had he done so when Captain Fred Spruel entered.

"Ah, Spruel, I was just going aboard to see you."

"Am glad I saved you the trouble, Vail, though you are always welcome in my sea home as you know."

"I have news for you."

"And I for you; but let me hear what you have to say first."

"Well, I told you I would arrange it and I have."

"To catch Mountjoy?"

"Yes, but you must aid me, as I wrote you this morning."

"I am wholly at your service."

"I felt that you would be; but you can sail soon?"

"Well, yes; I am ready, as far as that is concerned," was the reply, seemingly with hesitation.

"Good! then there is no trouble."

"What is your plan?"

"I have some unboxed goods in Boston I am anxious to get, and I have the boxes here, so I thought it would be a good idea to have Mountjoy, while awaiting his day of sailing, to run to the city for me."

"He will carry the boxes, nominally to be packed there, and if you are at sea with your vessel, you must lie off the Boston Lightship, bring him to and make a thorough search of his vessel."

"You spoke with the same confidence before."

"Do as I tell you, if you wish to cancel that two thousand dollars, listen to no excuses, and simply put under arrest all on board."

"I'll do it; but then?"

"Bring your prize to this port."

"Why not to Boston?"

"It is best to bring him here," was the significant response.

"I understand."

"I hope so, for this time nothing will mis-

carry."

"Anything else?"

"Well, no."

"Now hear my story?"

"Yes, I am all attention."

"I met Mountjoy just now."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I landed at your wharf, and he stepped forward and confronted me."

"Yes."

"He was courtly as a prince, but his smile was devilish, and he said:

"Captain Spruel, I presume?"

"I replied in the affirmative, and he coolly asked if I had had received a letter."

"I told him I had and he asked my intention regarding it."

"And your reply?"

"I replied that as a gentleman and an officer I could not meet one under the taint of being a lawless character, and so refused."

"Good! and then?"

"He plainly told me that the charge had been disproven against him, and I told him then that he was not my equal."

"And his reply?"

"That this was America, where all men were free and equal, that he was born a gentleman, and unless I retracted my words to him in writing, he should force me to meet him."

"He is bold."

"Yes, and means to do it."

"Then my plot ripens just in time, for you will be at sea in an hour, and when you have captured his vessel and proven him guilty of smuggling, why it puts an end to him of course."

"Yes, and I'll get off at once, for I do not wish to meet him in a duel."

"What, not afraid of him?"

"Captain Vail, do not presume upon the fact,

that I owe you money to hint that I fear any man."

"Pardon me, but I took your own words that you did not wish to meet him."

"I said so, and I mean it; but I am anxious to keep very quiet just now, after the blunder I made at the Isles of Shoals, or I will be getting orders to leave my ship in command of my first officer and report on board of some small craft for duty under some blockhead who may rank me."

"A duel, in which I killed this man would cause people to say I forced the affair upon him to cover up my blunder, and to seek revenge."

"Do you understand?"

"I do, and you are right."

"I did not really feel that you feared him, for I knew you to be a dead shot and as good a swordsman as I am, and that is saying a great deal."

"In truth, folks say you have never met your superior with a blade and I have been anxious to cross with you, for I pride myself upon my skill as a swordsman."

"It will give me pleasure, some time," was the reply of Captain Spruel, with the air of a man who knew his power and disregarded his comrade's asserted skill.

Then he added:

"Well, I must be off."

But, as he spoke, a clerk ushered Lieutenant Herbert Deering into the office.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HARBORAGE.

AMONG the old families in Salem there was one that had only a remnant left, or rather one who still remained in that pleasant town.

This one was Miss Jessie Kittredge, a charming lady, who was nearing her half a century of years.

She was a handsome woman, a trifle haughty perhaps, yet with a kind heart and a way of being generous that had won for her the gratitude of the poor.

Miss Kittredge had been born an heiress, as her mother and grandmother before her, and she had a just pride in her race.

Why she had never married, beautiful as she certainly had been in her girlhood, and accomplished and rich, no one ever knew.

She had remained Miss Kittredge, however, at her own sweet will, for scores of lovers had she had.

After she had told off on the mile-posts of life thirty-five years, Miss Kittredge considered herself, acknowledged it in fact, an old maid.

Her father died and left her a large estate and complete control of it, for she had been his manager in truth for the past ten years of her life.

He had no other heirs, but left legacies to various kinspeople, who had scattered elsewhere, and among them was a liberal sum to the son of his other daughter, Herbert Deering.

Herbert's parents had died when he was a mere lad, and for several years, until he became a soldier, he had been under the guardianship of his grandfather, Colonel Kittredge, for the old gentleman had served with distinction as an officer in the Revolution.

His Aunt Jessie had been like a mother to him, and he loved her as such, and he was acknowledged to be her heir, and thus Colonel Kittredge had simply left him a legacy, for the young man was also well off from his inheritance from his parents.

Harborage, the home of Miss Kittredge, was a delightful abode.

It was situated above the town, surrounded with numerous acres of well-kept grounds, and the mansion was of stone, and very roomy and comfortable.

Miss Kittredge lived well, and kept up a style that many of the good Salemites, with increasing fortunes, sought to copy after; but she had been born to her wealth, and it was natural to her.

Her servants, and she kept over half a dozen of them, had almost been raised in the family.

The old butler, Jem, was as dignified as a deacon, and as punctual as a school-teacher in all his duties.

His wife was housekeeper, and then there was the cook, the house-girl, Miss Kittredge's maid, and the coachman, with a gardener and a man-of-all-work to do the chores, so that Harborage was the place of Salem, though Ezra Vail sought to rival its mistress in the style of his home and surroundings.

Miss Kittredge had just been summoned to dinner by Jem the butler, when a light vehicle, drawn by two spirited horses, dashed up to the door.

The horses were foam and dust-covered, and appeared to have been driven on a long journey.

A servant leaped out, and then followed a young man in uniform.

It was Lieutenant Herbert Deering.

"Mack, drive around, and then get my traps to my room, for it is aunt's dining hour, and I must not keep her waiting," he said to his valet; but just then a servant came to take the team, and, while Herbert Deering greeted him in a friendly way, Mack secured the traveling-bag of his master and entered the mansion.

Miss Kittredge, dressed as she always was for dinner, as though she had a score of guests, met her nephew at the door and greeted him affectionately.

"It is so good of you, Herbert, to give me this pleasant surprise; but hasten to your room and make your toilet, for dinner was just announced."

Herbert dashed up the stairs like a boy and in ten minutes came down in full dress uniform and offered his arm to his aunt, who was awaiting him in the parlor, for Miss Kittredge allowed nothing to interfere with the etiquette she had been brought up to.

"Why Herbert, you wear a captain's rank!" she cried in delighted amazement, as she gazed at his designation of rank on his new uniform.

"Yes, aunt, congratulate me, for I got my company a week ago, but have been expecting it, yet concluded to surprise you."

"It was given me because I put down that mutiny in the barracks some months ago, and saved the colonel's life."

"Well, Captain Deering, I do congratulate you from my heart."

"You are young to hold such a rank, but you have won each promotion, so deserve them."

"Now, what is all this I have been reading about the colors presented to your regiment by the Boston ladies, and the attack on your vessel on the way to the city?"

They were seated at a table now, Herbert having cordially shaken hands with the dignified Jem, and handed him a glass of brandy and water as an appetizer, a thing he had done for the colonel for twenty years.

Herbert told of the going to Boston and how he had taken Government conveyances to Portsmouth and there caught the pretty schooner Winged Arrow.

"And Captain Spruel attacked her on suspicion alone, as a smuggler!"

"This was a grave error for an officer to make, Herbert."

"Grave indeed, aunt, but it will be smoothed over."

"By the way, do you know Spruel?"

"I have met him, and he was here to call, and seemed a very pleasant gentleman."

"Pleasant enough, but he has some reason of hatred against Mountjoy, and is silly enough to let it get the best of his reason."

"I am glad that you have good judgment, Herbert—your very good health, Captain Deering."

"Thank you, aunt, and to your bright eyes," and having set his glass down Herbert asked:

"Did you ever see Mountjoy?"

"No, I think not."

"Did not a sailor check your horses when Whip had lost control of them, in town, one day?"

"Yes, and saved my life, and Whip's, I am sure."

"The Vidette was firing a salute in the harbor, they became frightened and would have gone headlong over the wharf, had not a sailor caught them at the risk of his life, but I could never learn who he was, for I wished to reward him."

"Am glad you did not know, for it was Mountjoy, aunt, and though skipper of a coasting craft, he is a gentleman to the manner born, only reduced in circumstances."

"He did not tell me this, but his mate did, and said the captain would not allow it to be known."

"He is modest indeed, but I must surely see him to thank him."

"Yes, and you have to thank him for saving my life too, aunt," and Herbert told the story of his rescue at sea.

Miss Kittredge turned pale at the thought of her nephew's danger, and said fervently:

"God bless that brave man, Mark."

"So say I, aunt, and I came here to see him, as well as to see you."

"I got back to the regiment, presented the colors, and found my captain awaiting me, so got leave and drove down with my own team to see you."

"But I wished to see if something cannot be done for Mountjoy—mind you, in a delicate way, for, as I told you he is a gentleman, and he is married."

"Indeed, and he lives here?"

"Yes, he has a cottage on the harbor, and calls it Ivy Lodge—"

"Ah! I know the place well, and the past year it has been beautified so that I have fallen in love with it and often drive by to get a glimpse of it, while there is a most beautiful young girl there."

"His wife, I guess, for he said she was under twenty, though she has a little family of twins."

"Indeed! the dear creatures."

"The parents or the twins, aunt?"

"That's it, all ladies like twins."

"They seem to think they are intended as a prize in life's lottery, and the one who draws a prize of the kind is envied."

"For shame, Herbert."

"Forgive me, but I thought so."

"But it is strange you have never heard of the Mountjoys, aunt, for there is much talk regarding them."

"I never listen to, nor allow gossip, Herbert," said Miss Kittredge calmly.

"Good for you, my dear aunt, I know that you do not and am sorry that there are not more like you, for we would all be happier for it."

"But Mountjoy has been under a shadow, and I am sure without cause."

"He is no more a smuggler than I am; but he has been ostracized here, he and his wife, and I am sure that he has some secret foe who is at the bottom of it all."

"I shall take pleasure in calling upon Mrs. Mountjoy, Herbert, and anything that you deem it best to do for Captain Mountjoy, you have only to let me know," and Miss Kittredge left her nephew alone at the table to smoke a cigar.

Then he joined his aunt in the parlor, but retired early as he was fatigued, and it had been decided that he would go down-town the next morning and see Mark Mountjoy, while his aunt should call at Ivy Lodge.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MEMORY OF THE PAST.

TRUE to her resolve, the next morning, Miss Kittredge ordered her carriage and drove down to Ivy Lodge, the cottage home of the Mountjoys.

Alma was in the garden among her flowers, and looking indeed like a beautiful young girl, in her pretty blue dress and sun hat.

Her face was flushed with her work, for she was gathering a large bunch of flowers, as was her wont, to put in her husband's cabin, for she always sent him to sea with some such sweet remembrance of her.

She saw the stylish carriage stop at her door and wondered, and then she politely advanced and met the lady whom she saw alight from the vehicle and enter her little gate.

Miss Kittredge, in her elegant attire, was charmed at sight of the lovely young wife, but was assured that it could not be Mrs. Mountjoy.

"Good-morning, miss; is this the home of Captain Mark Mountjoy?"

"It is, madam, but my husband is in the town now."

"Your husband? I could not believe that you were Mrs. Mountjoy; but it is you whom I have called on, for I am Miss Kittredge, of The Harborage, and the aunt of Captain Deering."

Alma had heard of the haughty lady of The Harborage, and Mark had told her of Herbert Deering, and what a splendid fellow he was.

So Alma greeted Miss Kittredge in a way that won that lady's heart, and where she had expected to find a country lass, as it were, she discovered in Alma one who had been a belle in the brilliant society of New Orleans, and yet accepted her position as a coaster's wife with all the grace in the world.

So where Miss Kittredge had expected to remain two minutes, she stayed two hours, fondled the twins, looked at the flowers, and praised Alma's housekeeping, which was perfect.

As she was going out to her carriage, accompanied by Alma, Mark Mountjoy came home to his dinner, and was presented.

Miss Kittredge greeted him warmly, and asked then quickly:

"Are you a relation of the Mountjoys of Virginia, Captain Mountjoy?"

"My father was a Virginian, Miss Kittredge, and came North to Harvard to be educated, and there meeting my mother, married, and entered the ministry."

"Was your father then the Reverend Malcolm Mountjoy?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, madam."

"I knew when he was a candidate for Holy Orders. I knew him very well—yes, very well."

"I was young then, a mere girl, but your father was a dear friend of mine."

She seemed to have been thinking aloud, rather than speaking to Mark, and both the sailor and his wife saw tears come into her eyes.

They told of some sorrow of the past, and with a blush, like a young girl, Miss Kittredge recollected herself, and said:

"But how time flies, for I knew Mr. Mountjoy before he was married."

"We must be good friends, Captain Mountjoy, and your wife must come often to see me."

"Good-by."

The coachman was amazed to see her kiss Alma, and shake hands warmly with the handsome young sailor, for his mistress was not demonstrative in her friendships.

But it pleased Whip immensely, as he recognized in the sailor the one who had saved him from being dragged with his horses over the wharf, and with him the carriage containing Miss Kittredge.

"I'm glad the missus has found you, sir, and I want to thank you, sir, indeed I do, for saving us that day," said Whip, earnestly.

Mark made some pleasant remark, and Miss Kittredge drove away.

"Mark, isn't she lovely?" said Alma.

"She is, indeed, and now I recall having heard my mother speak of her."

"Did she know her, too?"

"Yes, though Miss Kittredge did not speak of my mother, you noticed."

"Yes; and I noticed, too, the tears came into her eyes when she spoke of your father."

"I saw them, and let me tell you, Alma, that lady has a romance in her life."

"She met my father when he was a student at Harvard, and she loved him desperately, though she was not sixteen then."

"He had just become engaged to my mother, and this fact was not generally known where he lived."

"Miss Kittredge was visiting at Cambridge, and they were thrown together a great deal for several months."

"Then my father went away—went to tell my mother the truth, that he had made a mistake, that he had found out who it was he really loved."

"He arrived to find her mother dead—killed in an accident to the stage-coach—and her father dying, and the latter begged that he would then and there marry his daughter."

"He yielded—he had not the heart to bring more sorrow upon the orphan girl—and they were married."

"But he wrote to Miss Kittredge—her name is Jessie, for I recall it now—telling her all, and she responded that he had done what he should do, and their lives divided."

"Then my father studied for the ministry, and to his dying day he made my mother a noble husband; but my mother knew all, long after she was married, and never let my father know that she did, but she told me."

"And let me tell you, Alma, that I left with the clergyman who has my father's charge, some money to place a monument over my parents' graves."

"He sent his plans to a stone-cutter, and was told that he already had in charge a monument, a magnificent one, ordered for the graves of my father and mother."

"He said the lady who gave the order declined to have her name given, but said she was an old friend, and upon the plans I saw a part of her name—it was 'tredge'—and that is how I know it was Miss Kittredge."

"I ran down to see the monument, and it is a grand one, and I wrote the clergyman to give my money to the poor of my father's parish; but, my dear Alma, I came home to tell you something that will distress you."

"Ah Mark! more trouble?"

"A duel, Alma, for I am to meet Captain Fred Spruel at sunset this evening, on the shores of Naugus Head—my God! she has fainted."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WELL MET.

THE arrangement for the duel at Naugus Head occurred in this way.

When Captain Herbert Deering left The Harborage, to have a look at the town and drop in on Mark Mountjoy, he went to the shore to see whether his vessel was in port or not, and if so where anchored.

He did not observe, among the many vessels that met his gaze, the well-known Winged Arrow and concluded that she was not at Salem, so he went up-town to do some business when he met face to face the man he wanted to see.

"Ah, Mountjoy, glad to see you, for I've been looking you up."

Mark Mountjoy's flush of pleasure told that he was glad to see Herbert Deering, for he had taken a great fancy to the young officer, and his greeting was most cordial.

"I did not anticipate seeing you so soon again," said Mountjoy.

"Nor did I expect to get here so soon, but I got my promotion, and asked for leave and here I am."

"Have you heard any more about that Isles of Shoals affair?"

"No, sir; but I wrote Captain Spruel a letter he cannot fail to respond to."

"I saw him in Boston, for he came there to see me and have me send my report of the affair to Port-Captain Hunnewell."

"I did so, and if he sees it he'll wish to call me out, for I spoke of his act as a blunder that did not have the merit of an accident, but was premeditated, and I gave you as good a send-off as possible, reporting your noble risk of life to save me from death."

"Oh, do not speak of that, for I am like a fish in the water, and I knew Mate Manning's cool head would manage the schooner well and soon pick us up."

"Ever modest, my dear Mountjoy; but you look worried?"

"I am worried, sir, and I'll tell you why."

"I am not rich enough to miss a good cargo when I can get one, and I sail to-night with special freight for Boston, to return in time to load for my regular sailing day, which carries me this voyage to Portland on the Kennebec, for I alternate in my voyages, taking, as you know, Portsmouth for one of my ports."

"Now, Captain Spruel is in port, and must have come here in answer to my letter, and if I leave it will seem like running off to avoid him, for he knows well my regular sailing day."

"So far from it, I am determined to meet him, to force him to meet me, if he objects, for the insults he has heaped upon me, and it worries me to feel, now that he is here, I must leave."

Captain Deering was silent a moment and then said:

"I do not think Spruel cares to meet you, Mountjoy."

"He claims that I am not his equal."

"That I know; but that is no ground as you are his equal in family, and only your position is a humble one at present."

"But he hesitates also as he knows he is in hot water just now, after his Isles of Shoals blunder, and he wishes to keep quiet for the present."

"But I shall not permit it, sir."

"You are right, and I uphold you in your act, for I know just how you feel."

"May I ask who is to serve you in this affair?"

"Do you know, Captain Deering, I have not a friend on earth—"

"Ah, Mountjoy, you forget Herbert Deering."

"Pardon me, I did, for I believe you to be my friend; but in business I know a few people, but they are not my friends, and my wife and myself are all alone."

"My aunt has gone to call on Mrs. Mountjoy this morning."

"Ah! indeed, that is kind of her, for I know what the position of your aunt is, Captain Deering; but she will find Mrs. Mountjoy a lady, for her father was a wealthy Southern planter, and Alma could have married splendidly, had she so wished."

"Well, Mountjoy, I must meet her, for I shall call myself soon; but now let us get rid of this infernal Spruel trouble."

"So you had thought of no one to befriend you?"

"My mate, Mabrey Manning, I shall have to call on."

"Not so, for I will act as your friend."

"You! but you are an officer of the service, and—"

"And so is Spruel; no, I'll second you, Mountjoy, and I'll do it at once, so you need worry no more."

"Spruel is in port, either on board his vessel or up at the Salem Inn, and I shall call on him from you and force him to ask pardon, fight, or back down."

"If he attempts the latter from his reasons stated, then he shall have to meet me, for it will be a reflection that I am the friend of a man who is not a gentleman."

"Come, let us go to your vessel and talk it over."

This the two friends did, and people who knew the gallant Captain Deering, seemed a little surprised to see him walking arm and arm with a coaster skipper.

He was frequently stopped by the prominent citizens of the place, whom they met on the way to the wharf.

The Winged Arrow lay against the dock, loading the boxes that were to be taken to Boston for the goods to be sent for, and Mark led the way into the cabin, got out of the locker a decanter of brandy and glasses, and the two sat down together for a talk.

"Now, Mountjoy, let me understand just your wishes in this matter," said Herbert Deering.

"You seem to feel no doubt but that I am the honest man I claim to be," said Mark with a smile.

"Of course I do, I could take oath on it, for no wicked man ever shielded an evil conscience under your face," was the frank response.

"Thank you, sir; but you wish to know my intentions?"

"Yes, fully."

"If you were in my position, would you put up with an insult simply because you were a poor coaster?"

"I would not, all things being equal, and I mean by that if I were well born, as you are, I certainly should defend my honor, whereas if I were a humble skipper, I might not dare do so, or even think of demanding justice from an officer of the Government!"

"You feel as I do, Deering, and as you have kindly consented to serve as my friend, I will ask you to go to Captain Spruel with a challenge from me."

"And he has the choice of weapons?"

"Of course."

"I saw you wield a blade, and you are a marvel with a weapon of that kind; but suppose he selects pistols?"

"It is a matter of perfect indifference to me," was the cool reply.

"Very well, I will at once seek him, and as you must sail this afternoon the sooner the better."

"And as I sail for Boston and round Naugus Head, you might suggest there, about sunset, if it suits his convenience, for the wind is fair for us to soon run there; but of course to name the place is his prerogative also."

"Yes, but Naugus Head would be the spot," and ten minutes after Captain Herbert Deering entered the private office of Ezra Vail and surprised that gentleman and Fred Spruel together

as has been seen, and to the evident confusion of both, who knew the army officer as the friend of Mark Mountjoy.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ACCEPTANCE.

CAPTAIN EZRA VAIL had met the young army officer, so knew him when he was announced at his office door by a clerk.

That he was surprised to see him enter goes without saying, as he had no business with him, to occasion a visit, and as for Captain Spruel he was simply more than amazed.

He had no idea of the presence of Herbert Deering in Salem, and intuitively he seemed to feel that his coming was on his account.

Captain Vail arose politely, for he was ever courtly in manner and so prided himself, and he said with an air of cordiality:

"Lieutenant Deering, I am glad to meet you again—you are acquainted with Captain Spruel of the navy?"

This was an assertion rather than a question, and Captain Deering paused.

"Yes, I have met Captain Spruel, and it was because I was told I would find him here, that I intruded upon you, Captain Vail."

"No intrusion, sir, but an honor."

"Be seated, please."

"Thank you, but I would ask if I could see Captain Spruel on a matter of importance."

"Certainly, make yourself at home in my office, and—"

"Pray, do not leave, Captain Vail—nay, I urge it, for any business Lieutenant Deering may have with me cannot be of a private nature."

"It is of a personal nature, sir, for I come from my friend, Captain Mountjoy, so you know best as to whether I shall speak out before Captain Vail."

Ezra Vail had hesitated, for he did not care to leave, and was anxious to know why Herbert Deering had sought the naval officer.

At the mention of his "friend, Captain Mountjoy," Captain Spruel had slightly started.

He knew that Mark Mountjoy had sent him a direct challenge, and that he should have obtained the services of a man like Herbert Deering as his second was an intense surprise to him, and moreover it was a deep regret.

He knew well the influence of young Deering and his family, and that he was the main man to hurt him, if so he pleased, by his report of his mistaken attack on the Winged Arrow.

That he was Mountjoy's friend, was proof positive that he was against him, he thought, and he said coldly:

"I desire you to speak before my friend, Captain Vail, sir, though I am at a loss to know how a gentleman holding the high rank of a lieutenant of artillery can come as the friend of a common coaster captain."

"My dear sir, permit me to say, for your increased surprise, that a late promotion makes me hold a still higher rank, that of captain of artillery, and were I colonel I would still be proud to serve my brave friend, Mark Mountjoy, while I will not permit any criticism of my acts from Lieutenant Frederick Spruel, of the navy."

This was carrying the war into Africa, so to speak, with a vengeance, for it stamped his friendship for Mountjoy, gave him a hint that he was not a lieutenant, and that he, Spruel, was in reality, though acting captain, and more, that he would not permit himself to be under criticism for befriending any one when he chose to.

Fred Spruel colored, and Captain Vail saw that the young army officer was no ordinary man to deal with, and he sighted breakers ahead he thought.

"I meant not to criticise Captain Deering's acts, for he is free to do as he deems best, but I confess my surprise certainly that he represents one whom I can only regard in the light of a seaman."

"He may so seem to Captain Spruel, but not being in the navy, as an American citizen and a gentleman, Captain Mountjoy can command recognition, and as his representative here, it will be given him."

This was as a dare to Spruel that to refuse to recognize Mark Mountjoy was to quarrel with him.

Captain Spruel bit his lips in a vexed way and said in a haughty tone:

"May I ask the object of this visit, sir?"

"You desire me to speak before Captain Vail?"

"I do, sir."

"Very well, sir. I come from my friend, Captain Mark Mountjoy, of the merchant marine service, to say that he has been insulted by Captain Spruel before the world, and he demands an apology for his words to him and accusations against him of a false character."

"He refers to my charging him with lawlessness?"

"He does, sir."

"He expects me to retract my charge that he is a smuggler?"

"He demands it, sir."

"But if I believe that he is a smuggler?"
 "You do not in your heart believe so, sir, I feel assured, and I for one can pronounce your charge against Captain Mountjoy a false one."
 "You have proof, sir, of your words?"
 "I have the proof of the word of my friend, and I cannot doubt the honor of such a man."
 "And I believe I know, almost, that Mark Mountjoy is leading an outlaw's life."
 "Bold words, sir, but you can give no proof, and your mistake at the Isles of Shoals should make you wary of how you take a thing for granted."

Fred Spruel's face again flushed with anger and he seemed to find it hard to subdue his passion; but with an effort he succeeded and asked:

"May I ask if Captain Deering made a report of the affair he flings in my face?"

"I did, sir."

"And forwarded it to Commandant Hunnewell?"

"I did, sir, within the hour after I last saw you."

"I suppose it was in praise of the coaster?"

"It was a truthful report, Captain Spruel, and one which did justice to my gallant friend, to whom I owe my life."

"But I came here to seek no quarrel with you, sir, but to ask an apology from you to my friend."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I shall demand that you give him the satisfaction due from you to a gentleman whom you have traduced."

"A gentleman?" sneered Fred Spruel.

The eyes of Herbert Deering flashed at this, and he said in a voice of deadly earnestness:

"I hope Captain Spruel does not imply by his sneer that I would represent one who was not a gentleman?"

Here Captain Vail spoke up with:

"No, no, Captain Deering, I think you misunderstood Captain Spruel?"

"Your position is too well known, sir, for me to imply aught against you that was wrong; but I decline to apologize to your friend."

"So be it; sir, in his name I demand a meeting with him."

"Suppose I refuse?"

"I will then deem him right, sir, in branding you as a coward," was the frank response of Herbert Deering, and it brought the hot blood to Fred Spruel's face in a torrent.

"Do you mean to impute, sir—"

"I impute nothing now, sir; but I await your refusal or acceptance of the challenge I bear."

"I accept, sir."

"May I ask you to name your friend?"

"Vail, you will serve me in this trouble which you have heard the purport of?"

"Certainly, Captain Spruel, but I would know something as to your wishes in regard to weapons, time and place."

"It is a matter of perfect indifference to me, so say to-day, anywhere you please, and any weapons."

"As that leaves choice with us, sir, I will name sunset to-day, Naugus Head as the place, for my friend sails for Boston this afternoon, and swords, with pistols to fall back on if swords fail."

"That is satisfactory, perfectly so," said Captain Spruel quickly, checking Ezra Vail in what he would have said, and with a bow Herbert Deering left the office, while as soon as his back was turned the merchant cried excitedly:

"In Heaven's name, Spruel, what do you mean when all is arranged to catch Mountjoy in our trap?"

"You are a fool to risk your life, and—"

"I know what I am about, Captain Vail, and what I do you must help me in."

"I am at your service, Spruel," was the reply of the merchant who was assured that Captain Spruel had some plot on hand to get the better of his enemy the young coaster.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CAPTAIN HAS A PLAN.

CAPTAIN HERBERT DEERING went from the office of Messrs. Vail & Company, back to the Winged Arrow; but he found that Mark Mountjoy had gone home to dinner, so he went up to The Harborage to get lunch, for the fashionable hour for dining with Miss Jessie Kittredge was at six o'clock and she never broke her rule.

Miss Kittredge returned home a short while before her nephew, and with more enthusiasm than she was wont to show, said:

"Herbert, I am charmed with your new friends, and agree with you that they are as elegant in manner as one could wish, and anyone can see that they were well-born and accustomed to the very best."

"I am glad you like them, aunt, and I feel that under your protection they will not be snubbed as they have been, and for which I am sure they have to thank some secret foe; but Mountjoy has boldly taken a step to show that he cannot be insulted with impunity."

"And what is that?"

"He challenged Captain Spruel, of the Vidette, to meet him."

Miss Kittredge looked surprised.

"Has he not been rash?"

"No, Aunt Jessie, he thinks there is malice, rather than duty in Spruel's acts toward him, and upon the deck of his own vessel the captain took particular pains to insult Mountjoy, and was then told he should be held responsible."

"Mountjoy gave him a chance to retract, when he saw that he was wrong, but Spruel was stubborn and refused, so he challenged him."

"And you are interested?"

"Yes, aunt, I forced my service upon Mountjoy, who was reluctant to accept them, and was to have his mate as his second; but I wished him to have fair play, so offered to serve him."

"I am sorry this affair cannot be arranged peacefully, Herbert, but am glad as Captain Mountjoy has shown the spirit to resent Captain Spruel's insult, he will be so well cared for as to have you for his second, for I have heard of your skill in such matters and your perfect knowledge of the code duello.*"

"When does it take place?"

Miss Kittredge took the affair as a matter of course, and so again asked:

"What weapons, and where will it be?"

"I am not betraying professional secret, aunt in telling you, so will say that it will be at Naugus Head at sunset to-day, and I must be off, for I have to see Mountjoy and arrange all satisfactorily."

Soon after Herbert Deering left the mansion and made his way to the Winged Arrow again.

He found Mark still absent, so left a note for him should he miss him and went on to Ivy Lodge.

He met Mark just leaving his home and bearing a suspicious-looking box and bundle with him.

Alma had been terribly shocked when she heard that Mark was to fight a duel, but it was at the fear that he might be wounded or killed, rather than the thought of duelling, for she came from a part of the country where the practice was an every-day affair, and both her father and brother had been engaged in affairs of honor more than once.

"Mark, I am proud of you for resenting the insult and showing that officer that you are not to be put down with impunity, humble though the position you hold; but oh, Mark, what if you should be wounded, or killed?" she asked, when her husband had told her that Captain Deering had gone to see Captain Spruel and arrange a meeting at Naugus Head for that day at sunset.

"I am not a bad hand with the sword, Alma, and am also a good shot, so do not feel any dread," was the answer, and he entered into a conversation regarding his belongings as coolly as possible with his wife, and she, like the brave woman she was, behaved nobly.

At last he said that he must get his weapons in trim, and he got out his pistol-box and put the pretty pair of weapons in perfect condition.

Then he looked to his swords, and wrapping them up, kissed his little twin children good-by, and Alma, with a brave face, but eyes filled with tears, followed him to the gate.

There as he lingered a moment he saw Captain Herbert coming, so awaited his approach.

"Ah, captain, I am glad to see you, and happy to present you to my wife."

"I hope I have not caused you any inconvenience by being away from my vessel?"

"No, indeed, and I am glad to have found you here, for I have wished to meet Mrs. Mountjoy," and the officer warmly grasped the hand of the beautiful young wife, with evident surprise at her beauty in spite of what his aunt had told him of Alma.

"But for your noble husband here, my dear madam, I would never have had the pleasure of meeting you, for he saved me from death at the risk of his own life."

"You met my aunt this morning, she told me?"

"Yes, she was so kind as to honor me with a call, and I thank her and you also for it, Captain Deering; but you are to be my husband's second in this affair?" and Alma's eyes again filled with tears.

"You know of it, then?"

"Oh, yes, she is a brave little woman, and I told her all, and arranged my affairs in case it goes against me," was the cool reply of Mountjoy.

"You are indeed a brave woman and have a husband worthy of you; but, as I can speak before you, I will say to your husband that the meeting is settled upon for Naugus Head about sunset, with swords as weapons, and pistols if they fail."

"They must not fail," was the laconic answer of Mountjoy, and then he asked:

"Did he seem disinclined to give me satisfaction?"

"I thought so; but he saw no way of evading it."

"Who is his second?"

* In these days dueling was winked at if not allowed, and duels were of frequent occurrence.—AUTHOR.

"Captain Ezra Vail."

"Ah! I have heard they are great friends; but you went by my schooner?"

"Yes, and she will be ready, I think, on time."

"She must be—oh! there goes a boat out to the Vidette now, so I must go, Alma."

She threw her arms about his neck, and then said in a low tone to Captain Deering:

"I feel that he is safe in your hands."

Then she turned, as though not daring to trust herself further, and walked rapidly back toward the cottage.

"She is a dear little woman," muttered Mark, as though to himself, and Captain Deering responded:

"She is, indeed, and you have a treasure in such a wife, and let me say here, Mountjoy, to remove any anxiety from your mind, that should harm befall you, which, however, I have no fear of, your wife shall be as my sister, and your children shall be well cared for I promise you."

"God bless you," came fervently from the sailor's lips, and as if to avoid thanks, Captain Deering went on:

"Now I have heard that Captain Spruel is famous as a shot and swordsman, and so you must watch him as you would a hawk."

"I'll be careful," was the modest reply, and the two friends came to where there was a view of the harbor, and the Vidette was visible standing out toward the sea and spreading all of her canvas as she went along.

"It seems strange he should set all sail to run so short a distance," Mark Mountjoy remarked, and they walked rapidly on to the schooner, and the mate said that Captain Ezra Vail was in the cabin waiting to see them.

CHAPTER XXX.

STRATEGY.

AFTER his acceptance of the challenge of Mark Mountjoy, Fred Spruel left the office of Ezra Vail and went hastily on board of his vessel.

There he entered the cabin and went over his desk as though hunting for some document.

At last he came upon an official-looking document, and after examining it carefully, said:

"This will serve my purpose, for it has all the appearance of having just been received."

He took out some wax and a seal and sealing the paper wrapped it up in an outer cover and addressed it to:

"CAPTAIN EZRA VAIL."

Along with this he sent a note which read as follows:

"MY DEAR VAIL:—"

"I have no desire to face Mountjoy in a duel when his case will so soon be settled and he proven to be a smuggler, and I accepted his challenge as I told you for a purpose."

"Herewith I send you an official document, sealed and addressed to me, and which must purport to come from Portsmouth, being orders to go at once to sea on special duty."

"Send this out to me by messenger, and I will then send a note to you asking you to come aboard, tell you I am ordered to sea and ask you to explain to Mountjoy and Deering my exact position, and so will hold myself at their service on another occasion."

"Of course with Mountjoy's guilt proven that occasion will not come."

"I will explain more when I see you aboard ship."

"Destroy this note."

A midshipman was then sent ashore with the papers, and he found Captain Vail in his office, handed him the document and departed, saying that there was no response.

"The sly fox," said Ezra Vail, when he had read the note, and he took up the "orders" and glanced at the sealed package.

"It looks genuine," and so saying he called for a messenger and said:

"Go out to the Vidette with this official paper, which has arrived by special messenger for Captain Spruel, and ask if there is anything regarding the sailing of the Vidette to-day."

The clerk took the package and departed, and in less than an hour he returned with the request from Captain Spruel for Captain Vail to "come at once on board, as the Vidette must sail within half an hour."

This Ezra Vail did, and he found the cutter preparing to go to sea when he stepped on deck. Fred Spruel awaited him in the cabin and said:

"Well, my plan works well, so I'll go to sea and lay in the offing until the Winged Arrow comes out and is to be caught in the act of smuggling."

"Yes, and I will see Deering and Mountjoy."

"I guess they'll understand that my official duty is paramount to my personal affairs."

"I guess so; but should they not be I am ready to represent you with Mountjoy."

"I think there will be no danger of that, but I thank you."

The friends now parted, Ezra Vail going ashore while the Vidette got up anchor and headed seaward under full sail.

Captain Vail then made his way to the Winged Arrow, and expressing a determination to await the coming of Mountjoy and his second,

Mate Manning invited him into the pretty cabin of the schooner, and there the army officer and skipper found him.

"My dear Captain Deering, I am here on an important mission, and I may say an embarrassing errand," he said.

Captain Deering said in response:

"My friend Captain Mountjoy, Captain Vail."

Both bowed as though they had never met before, the skipper very coldly, and the army officer continued:

"Now, sir, I will hear what your unpleasant mission is?"

"It is unpleasant, as I have to beg indulgence for Captain Spruel."

"Indeed! has he decided not to meet my friend?"

"Oh no, sir, but he has been ordered away, for a special messenger came from Portsmouth with important dispatches for him, and he sent for me to come at once on board."

"And so he has run off and left you to take his place?"

The face of Ezra Vail flushed at this, and he saw that the army officer was neither friendly toward himself or his principal.

"He has been ordered away, sir, and in going has done his duty, for it is his Government who has the prior claim upon him, and he dared not delay the few hours until sunset."

"Under such circumstances, Captain Spruel has done right, Deering, so we must accept the situation," Mark Mountjoy very seriously put in.

"Certainly, for as a soldier I can understand that his duty has the first claim, so, Captain Vail we accept your explanation for your friend and would know your pleasure for the future."

"It is to have the duel postponed until the return of Captain Spruel, and I will notify you in ample time."

"That is satisfactory, sir," and Herbert Deering bowed as though the interview was at an end, and yet his manner was most courteous though cold.

Captain Vail arose and took his leave, muttering to himself as he returned to his office:

"Mountjoy has certainly made a magnificent looking man and I well remember his pluck as a boy."

"But he won from me the love that Lola La Salle would have given me, and I shall never forgive him."

"But for him, curse him, she would have now been my wife, instead of being wedded to that old miser Peter Rutledge."

"Well, I have arranged it well, for he is sailing with a cargo for me and little dreams that I am at the bottom of all his troubles."

"When they meet, Spruel will kill him and that will end it, and I will have proven myself such a good friend to his beautiful widow that I think I shall have no difficulty in winning her in time, and, egad, she's as lovely as is Lola, and that old miser will never die, I am sure, so I can marry her."

"No, I'll compromise on Mountjoy's lovely widow," and Ezra Vail chuckled over his future plans.

"Well, Mack, we can do no more for the present; but I think Spruel will soon return and your voyage will last but a week at furthest, and I'll be at The Harborage some time longer, so command me."

"Will you kindly send word to my wife that the affair is off for the present, my good friend, for it will relieve her anxiety?"

"I will go by myself on my way back to The Harborage; but you will be away soon I suppose?"

"At once, for the boxes are on board—good-by," and the two friends parted, Mountjoy at once setting sail, while Herbert Deering walked rapidly to Ivy Lodge and made known to Alma the turn in the affairs of her husband.

And together they stood on the little porch and waved farewell to the tall form on the deck of the Winged Arrow as she sped seaward into a snare set for her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CRAFT IN DISTRESS.

THE Vidette went out of the harbor of Salem under full sail and after rounding Naugus Head, shaped her course for Lowell Island.

Running to seaward of this island she dropped anchor, furling her sails, sent down her topmasts and appeared to be lying in wait and not desirous of being seen by any passing vessel, for even at dark not a light was set on board.

Just before sunset the man at the foretop reported to Captain Spruel:

"A small sloop with an immense spread of sail, coming along the coast south of Marblehead Harbor."

"Ay, ay, that's the craft," and the last three words Captain Spruel said to himself.

Then darkness fell upon the sea and still the Vidette lay in wait.

The Winged Arrow went out of Salem Harbor under full sail, for Mark Mountjoy was anxious to get back with the special cargo he was sent after, so as to unload, and load for his regular run.

Mark stood on the deck and was glad to see that Herbert Deering had already reached his home and made known to Alma that the duel would not come off that day at least.

He waved to them and then bent his every energy to getting all of the speed out of the Arrow that was possible.

It was just sunset when he rounded Naugus Head, and shaped his course for Boston.

The wind was blowing fresh, but the sea was calm, and the Winged Arrow went along like a deer.

About nine o'clock he was called to the deck by the cry from Mate Manning:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway, Manning?"

"She is standing across our course from seaward, sir, as though making for Marblehead, but sails very slow."

"I see her, and she is a sloop, but sails as though water-logged," and Mark bent his glass upon her.

"Ah! she signals, so head for her."

"Yes, and she signals as though most anxious for our coming," remarked the mate, and the schooner went flying along toward the sloop.

In half an hour she was within hail, and a man on board, after waving a red lantern thrice around his head, as though to attract attention, hailed:

"Aho! the schooner!"

"Ho, the brig!" responded Mark.

"We are in distress, our vessel has sprung a leak and will not hold up half an hour."

"Ay, ay, I'll send a boat aboard."

"Can you not come alongside, for we have a valuable cargo which we wish to save; but you must be quick about it."

"Ay, ay, I'll run alongside, but keep your men at your pumps the while."

A few moments after, the schooner under shortened sail glided up to the little sloop which had settled low in the water.

Half a dozen men were on board, and one who appeared to be skipper, said:

"We strained her carrying sail to reach port, and she'll not hold up long."

"Can you not reach Marblehead and save her?"

"No indeed, sir; but please let me show your men the cargo while mine keep the pumps going."

"All right," and the two crews sprung to work with a will.

"Where are you bound?" asked Mark of the skipper.

"To Boston, sir, and my cargo is in small packages, and of considerable value."

Mark was too busy helping a seaman in distress to ask more questions, and in less than an hour's time the cargo was transferred from the sloop to the schooner and the men called from the pumps.

They came with a rush and reported the sloop sinking, so that the lines were cast off and the schooner swung away, while the captain of the craft said:

"As it is calm, sir, I will keep in my boat near her, for she might not go down, and you will please deliver my cargo to Ketchum & Co. in Boston."

"If the sloop goes down, we can head for Marblehead, and make it in a few hours, for the tide is running in and my boat has a sail."

"As you deem best, sir; but I think you take a risk."

"I do not wish to lose the sloop, and she seems not to have settled any more."

Mark thought, also, that the sloop might be saved, if the crew recovered from their fright, and so urged no more, but gave orders to get the schooner on her course once more, while the sloop's boat returned to the sinking craft.

As the schooner swung round on her way the lookout cried:

"Sail, ho!"

"Whereaway?"

"Dead astern, sir, and she has crept up on us while we were helping the sloop."

"Ay, ay, I see her, and if I am not mistaken it is the Vidette, so she will tow the sloop into Marblehead if she does not sink," and Mountjoy turned his gaze upon the sinking craft.

The crew from the boat had boarded her, and sail was at once set.

Then the Vidette was seen to run down toward her and slacken speed, as though hailing, and a boat was launched and pulled toward the sloop.

A few minutes after, the Vidette came on, spreading more sail as she did so, and soon from her bows burst a red glare and the deep boom of a gun broke the stillness of the sea.

"What does he mean now?" said Mountjoy, as a solid shot flew over his vessel.

"Will you come to, sir?"

"Certainly, Manning, for he did not fire at me this time with his first shot."

"He doubtless wishes to send some word into port."

The schooner was just going about when a second gun was fired from the Vidette, which was rushing along under full sail.

As she came near, it was seen that she was ready for action, for her men were at their guns.

Mark Mountjoy calmly awaited her approach,

and coming near, the hail came in a deep, an angry voice:

"Ho, the schooner! Is that the Winged Arrow?"

"Ay, ay, sir, from Salem, and bound to Boston."

"What craft was that you were just lying alongside of?"

Mark Mountjoy recognized the voice of Captain Spruel, and replied somewhat hotly:

"You should know, Captain Spruel, having just left her yourself."

"Ha! you carry a high hand, Skipper Mountjoy, in defying the law, but I think you have gone too far to-night."

"I shall board you, sir."

"Ay, ay, sir, you are welcome, as I cannot prevent this your third indignity against me."

No reply came from on board the schooner, but a boat was lowered, and, full of armed men, pulled for the sloop.

As Captain Spruel sprung on deck, sword in hand, he was confronted by Mark Mountjoy, who said sternly:

"Well, sir, what means this third outrage upon me; please state, as I am anxious to continue on my course?"

"No doubt, Skipper Mountjoy, as you have not had time to hide the smuggled goods you took from yonder outlaw craft—nay, you need not fly into a rage, for I have the craft's crew prisoners, and arrest you and all on board your schooner also as lawbreakers and outlaws."

Then turning to an officer he continued:

"Put this man and his crew in irons."

CHAPTER XXXII.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

FOR an instant, after the words of Captain Spruel, Mark Mountjoy appeared as though he would spring upon the officer, in spite of the force at his back.

But he was unarmed, and not as before had his vessel the guns and support of Herbert Deering, and he saw the madness of any resistance, for there lay the Vidette, her men at quarters, not a cable's length from the Winged Arrow.

Then too he knew, if Captain Spruel believed what he said, he was but doing his duty.

If the crew of the sloop were really smugglers he had taken on board his vessel goods that were contraband, and he certainly was in an unenviable situation.

That Captain Spruel was glad to have caught him in an unfortunate situation to say the least, there was no doubt in the mind of Mark Mountjoy, for the looks of the naval officer plainly revealed as much.

"Send this man on board my vessel, Lieutenant Chapin, and confine him in pleasant quarters, but the crew leave on board the schooner and confine in the hold."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Then you take charge of the prize with a dozen men and put back for Salem."

"Yes, captain," answered the handsome young junior lieutenant of the Vidette, and the orders were quickly obeyed.

The sinking sloop meanwhile had not gone to the bottom, as it was believed she would, for upon going on board at the command of his captain to take charge of her as a prize, Midshipman Ben Thomas had quickly checked the leak and gotten the water out of her.

So the three vessels headed for Salem, the Winged Arrow leading, the sloop in her wake and the Vidette following astern of her prizes.

It was dawn when the three entered Salem Harbor, and as they had a beat to windward the sea was well up when they dropped anchor off the Government wharf.

Crowds of people gathered to see the Vidette bringing in a strange sloop and the well-known Winged Arrow as prizes, for no one could understand it.

Alma saw it too and her heart sunk within her at seeing her husband in more trouble.

Throwing on her bonnet and shawl she hastened to the dock and came full upon Captain Spruel who fairly started as he saw her pretty face, with surprised admiration.

"Pardon, sir, but you are a Government officer I believe?"

"I am, lady," and he politely raised his hat.

"I have come to see why the Winged Arrow has returned as a prize, for it is my husband's vessel, and I wish to see him."

"Your husband?"

"Is Mark Mountjoy your husband?" asked Fred Spruel with wonder in look and tone.

"He is, sir."

"My dear madam, I am sorry for you then."

"And why?"

Her eyes flashed as she asked the question though her face paled.

"Because, I regret to tell you that I caught your husband in the act of smuggling last night."

"It is false, sir, false! Pardon me, I did not say that you spoke falsely, but that the charge that he is a smuggler is utterly false, and I believe, it is the act of Captain Spruel to accuse him, for he hates my husband for some reason."

"Madam, I am Captain Spruel."

"You! then into your face I fling the charge of falsehood, when you say that my husband is a smuggler, or would do one illegal act."

The eyes of Alma flashed and she looked grandly beautiful, as she faced the officer, who said in a low voice:

"My dear madam, I had no cause to hate your husband, but acting under certain information given me, I supposed he was leading a lawless life."

"So I pursued him, but found no proof."

"I was so unfortunate a second time as to make an attack upon his vessel, feeling sure he was guilty, and again got no proof."

"To-night I caught him in the act, so arrested him and his crew and seized his vessel."

"You did not catch my husband doing aught that was wrong," said Alma, with firmness, though her heart sunk within her, for she recalled that Mark had once served under the pirate flag, and of late he had seemed to be unusually prosperous.

Then too there was his trip to Boston, between his regular voyages, and his seemingly determined resolve to meet Captain Spruel in a duel.

It caused her to feel sick at heart indeed; but that there was a doubt in her mind against her husband no one should see, so she asked calmly:

"May I see Captain Mountjoy, sir?"

"I regret to refuse you, madam, but no one must be allowed to see him."

"I am sorry, very sorry, but I cannot permit it."

"He will be tried, I suppose?"

"As soon as I can hear from the port captain at Portsmouth, to whom I shall send my report by a special messenger on horseback at noon, for I am anxious to show that I was not so mistaken in my belief of your husband's guilt."

"I will ask the permission of Commander Hunnewell for you to see the prisoner, and the day after to-morrow will give you his reply."

"I thank you," and Alma turned away with a suddenness that surprised the officer.

He had expected pleading and tears, and her cool manner of taking his refusal staggered him.

He watched her as she walked rapidly away and saw that she took the way back to her home.

"I do not believe she cares much for him, or she would have shown more feeling."

"By Neptune! but she's a beauty."

"I never saw a lovelier face and form, and she has spirit, too."

"Now to go to Vail's and write my report and send a mounted messenger with it to old Hunnewell."

Ezra Vail was in his office when the naval officer entered, and greeted him with apparent surprise.

"I heard the Vidette had returned, but could not believe it," he said.

"The Vidette did not return alone."

"Ah! you brought company?"

"Yes."

"The smuggler?"

"Yes."

"Mountjoy of course?"

"Yes, and his crew and vessel."

"You have proof of his lawless acts this time?"

"I have."

"Well, that settles it for him."

"It does, for I have the sloop and her crew from which he took the contraband goods."

"Ah! where is she at anchor?"

"I had not room for her to anchor near the Vidette and schooner, so let her go some little distance from me, out of the way of incoming and outgoing vessels."

"I see, and who is on board of her?"

"Her skipper and six men."

"And her goods?"

"Yes."

"Of course a prize crew."

"Yes, Midshipman Ben Thomas and four men."

"The best men of your crew?"

"Two of them are, the other two have served their time, so get paid off to-day, but will remain aboard until to-morrow when the others can go and take their place."

"Ah, yes, that is a good idea."

"And could the two you speak of as having served their time, be bribed?"

"Yes, for they are worthless fellows, anyhow."

"All right; but you have not made your report yet to old Hunnewell?"

"No, I wish to write it here."

"Of course."

"And send it by a special messenger on horseback."

"You can get one at the inn."

"Thank you."

"Now, tell me how Mountjoy took his capture?"

"Egad, I thought at one time he meant to resist me; but he did not and coolly took the matter when he saw that appearances were all against him; but what a lovely wife he has."

"You have seen her, then?" quickly asked Vail.

"Yes, she came to the dock and not knowing me asked about her husband, and you should have seen her eyes, and she had grand ones, when I told her he was a smuggler."

"She said I spoke falsely, and was his foe."

"Of course I denied it, and also refused her permission to see him, but said that I would ask Commandant Hunnewell."

"And then?"

"She left with no other word, and I came on here; but she is a beauty, certainly."

"She is not bad-looking," returned Ezra Vail, indifferently, and he yielded his desk for the naval officer to write his report, while, two hours after a horseman rode away on the highway leading to Portsmouth.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MASKED FOOTPAD.

WHEN Alma turned so abruptly away from Captain Spruel, she had suddenly made up her mind to some act, suggested by the words of the officer.

She returned at a rapid pace homeward, and there sought her husband's wardrobe, from which she took a number of articles of wearing apparel.

These she went over carefully, taking a stitch here and there, and seemed to be very intent upon her work for fully an hour.

Then she went to her own room, and soon after reappeared, bearing a large bundle in one arm and a long package, carefully wrapped up, in the other.

She left the cottage in a way that showed she did not wish to be seen, and by a path that led into the woods behind the little house and which ran back to the top of the hill.

Along the path she walked at a brisk step, bearing her bundles until she came to an old deserted house, and which rumor said was haunted by evil spirits, a murder having been committed there long years before.

She knew well that the woods where it was situated were avoided by all, but with utter fearlessness she pushed open the heavy door and entered.

Some fifteen minutes passed after her entrance and then there came out of the cabin a slender-formed personage, with a cloak thrown over the shoulders, a slouch hat shielding the head and a face that was hidden by a black mask.

Across his arm was thrown a short rifle, and along a path overgrown with weeds from long disuse, the form went at a rapid step until he came to a highway.

It was the stage-road to the east, Portsmouth, Portland, and other towns.

A large tree was on the side of the road, around which was a thicket of underwood, and here the masked personage halted.

Five, ten, thirty minutes passed away, and then came the rumble of wheels.

Out of sight shrunk the masked individual, and a wagon passed with a farmer on his way to town.

Soon after the fall of hoofs was heard and a horseman appeared in sight.

As he neared the tree the road led up a slight hill, and he drew his horse to a walk.

He was a young man of twenty, with red hair, freckled face and the general look of a stable-boy.

Suddenly he saw a form step before his horse, rifle covered him and a voice said sternly:

"Halt!"

"Oh, Lordy!"

The ejaculation came from the rider, but he obeyed the summons and halted.

"Dismount! this side!"

The rider obeyed, trembling in every limb, while he said anxiously:

"You hain't goin' ter kill me, be yer?"

"That depends."

"Out with your money if you would save your life."

"Oh, sir, I hain't got but a few dollars, given me for expenses on the way."

"What way do you ride?"

"To Portsmouth, sir."

"Lead your horse and take that path into the woods; but if you attempt to escape I will kill you."

The frightened man obeyed and after getting well out of sight of the highway was told to halt.

"Hitch your horse."

He obeyed.

"Now sit there on that log," ordered the masked footpad.

Again the horseman obeyed.

"Now, what have you about you?"

"Only five dollars, sir, to pay my way."

"That is not worth taking, so keep it."

"Oh, thank you, Mister Robber."

"What else have you?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Tell me no lies, if you value your life."

"No, no, sir, I would not lie to you, and I have only a letter."

"Let me see it."

The man handed out from an inner pocket of his jacket a sealed package.

"There is money in this?"

"Oh, no, sir, it's only a letter, from the Captain of the Vidette to the commandant at

Portsmouth, telling of the capture of a smuggler craft, I suppose, sir, for one was caught last night."

"I shall see for myself if the package contains money or not."

With this the masked footpad broke open the seal and some dozen pages were revealed closely written.

Hastily he glanced over them and then folding up the package handed it back to the bearer with the remark:

"I opened it without breaking the seal, as you see, and my advice to you is when you halt to-night, to put it back, as you can do, so that it will appear not to have been touched."

"I'll do it, sir; but you'll be letting me go then?"

"Yes, as you have told me the truth, for there was no money in it, and what you have is too paltry for me to touch."

"Wait here for five minutes and then mount your horse and go your way."

"Yes, sir, and thank ye," said the delighted messenger, and shouldering his gun, the footpad strode away, and was soon lost in the woods from the sight of the man he had halted on the highway.

He forgot to ask the commandant if I could see Mark, as he said he would, and as I felt sure he would not.

"Well, I know just what his report is, and being forewarned is to be forearmed," and the speaker entered the haunted cabin once more.

Soon after Alma reappeared, bearing her bundles, and made her way to her home.

She had been guilty of a lawless act, halting a messenger with Government dispatches on the highway and reading them; but she had acted to save her husband by being warned of what he would be accused of.

Reaching home, she soon after came out of her room wearing her street dress and bonnet, and telling the nurse she was going to The Harborage, set off in that direction.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BEARDING THE LION.

CAPTAIN HERBERT DEERING greatly enjoyed the restful life he led at The Harborage.

His aunt was anxious to do all in her power for his enjoyment and comfort, and was happy to have the gallant young soldier with her.

So it was that he had been lazily going about the house and grounds the day on which the Vidette arrived with her two prizes, and had not heard of the affair which was creating so much excitement down in the town.

His reveries in an easy-chair in the library, however, were brought to a sudden close by the coming in of the butler to announce a lady in the parlor who desired to speak with him.

He went at once, wondering who it could be, and discovered Mrs. Mountjoy awaiting his coming.

Her beautiful face was pale, her manner excited and he knew that something had gone wrong.

She had also asked for his aunt, and Miss Kittredge came in, wondering at the prompt return of her visit.

But Alma gave them little time for wonder, as she at once told her story and how she had been received by Captain Spruel.

"My poor child, how you have been made to suffer," said Miss Kittredge feelingly.

"He is not guilty of course, though appearances are against him, and I will soon know his story of the affair, for they can hardly refuse me," the young soldier said.

Then it was that Alma remarked:

"I cannot tell you how I got my information, Captain Deering, but I will vouch for its being reliable, and I know that Captain Spruel said nothing of my being allowed to see my husband in his report."

"Yet he told you he would ask that you might?"

"He did, sir."

"But you know that he did not make the request?"

"I do, and more, I can tell you about what the report was, if you care to hear it."

"Certainly, and by all means."

"You must not speak of my doing so, as I cannot betray my authority."

"Neither my aunt or myself will do so, Mrs. Mountjoy."

"Well, sir, he began by stating that he had intimation that a smuggling craft was off the coast, and he put at once to sea, ran down to the eastward of Lowell Island, and with topmasts housed lay in hiding."

He saw a sloop coming from the northward, and then sighted the Winged Arrow coming out of Salem Harbor, and there were signals between the two vessels.

"Then they neared each other and appeared to be lying alongside, and so remained for a long while, until he had run down near to them."

"The schooner and the sloop then parted company and he hailed the latter to find that she was a smuggler, but had transferred her cargo to the Winged Arrow, for being caught the smuggler captain at once confessed it."

"Then, putting a prize crew on board the sloop, he sent a shot over the schooner which

seemed to be unable to fly, for some reason, and bringing her to be boarded and arrested Mark and his crew for smuggling, after which he brought both vessels into Salem Harbor as prizes.

"He went on to say that being caught in the act, as it were, there was no doubt of Mark's guilt, and asked immediate instructions regarding his prisoners.

"Such was the report, Captain Deering."

"This looks black against Captain Mountjoy, but I do not believe him guilty."

"Thank you for your trust, sir, and I also believe him guiltless."

"I am glad to see your confidence in your husband, my child, and sincerely hope it may prove not misplaced, and I believe that it will be, in spite of appearances against him," Miss Kittredge remarked.

Then Herbert Deering was silent a moment, and said:

"It is remarkable how you know about the report of Captain Spruel, but as you do it shows just what the charge is against Mark, and we are forearmed.

"Now remain with my aunt while I go down-town and try to see Mark," and as Miss Kittredge also urged it, Alma stayed at The Harborage, while Herbert Deering at once went down-town.

He soon saw that the town was in a state of excitement, people in crowds were discussing the capture.

He went at once to the gate of the Government wharf, and asked to see the prisoner, Captain Mark Mountjoy.

He was refused by the officer in charge, but was referred to Captain Spruel.

"Where is he?" somewhat impatiently asked the soldier.

"At the office of Ezra Vail & Company," was the response.

Thither he went, and surprised the merchant whaler and the sailor together.

They were evidently annoyed at his appearance, but received him courteously, and he asked quickly:

"Captain Spruel, I called upon my friend, Mountjoy, just now, and your lieutenant refused to allow me to see him, so, assured that there was some mistake, I called upon you, sir, to ask the privilege."

"Your friend, sir, has proven himself unworthy of your friendship, and—"

"Captain Spruel, pray understand that I came not here to discuss the guilt or innocence of my friend, but to ask you to give me a permit to see him.

"Until you prove him guilty he is innocent in my opinion, and if you do not give me the authority, I shall seek it from higher authority than yourself."

"Ah! And what higher authority, may I ask?"

"From General Nevitte, who commands this department, and has written word that he will be my aunt's guest at The Harborage to-night.

"I believe you acknowledge him as a superior, sir."

Fred Spruel winced at this name, for he, as well as all other officers of the army and navy who were under the old general's command, greatly feared him, and he was aware that Herbert Deering was his grand-nephew, and a great favorite with the aged soldier, so rumor had it.

"Yes, sir, I acknowledge that General Nevitte is my superior officer, but as I did not refuse you permission to visit the prisoner, there is no reason why you should ask it of him."

"I am glad that you think better of it, sir, and do not force me to make a demand of you to let me visit my friend, and I desire also a pass to permit the prisoner's wife to see her husband to-morrow."

Fred Spruel bit his lips at this, and said:

"Captain Deering, you, as an army officer, I will allow to see Mountjoy, for your honor as an officer will prevent your doing one thing to aid him to escape just punishment by trickery; but his wife I cannot allow to visit him, without hearing from Commandant Hunnewell to whom I have sent my report, and made a special request to him to give Mrs. Mountjoy the requisite permission."

"As the authority is in your hands, sir, there was no reason to ask a permit from Captain Hunnewell; but as you wish higher authority than yourself, I will get it from General Nevitte to-night, of course telling him I was refused it by you."

Fred Spruel was white with rage, for he felt that the soldier was proving himself his master.

Had he not been suffering from a guilty conscience in the matter, he would have braved it out.

But he felt guilty, and the further words of Herbert Deering caused him to feel more so, for the soldier continued:

"There is something very remarkable to me in the determined manner in which Captain Mountjoy has been hunted down to be proven a smuggler, while men known to be outlaws, ay, and pirates, infest this coast from Maine to the Gulf and are hunted with such lukewarmness that they elude all cruisers.

"It looks to me as though Captain Mountjoy was to be made the scapegoat of all of them."

Ezra Vail winced at this, and Captain Spruel hotly replied:

"Do you intimate, Captain Deering, that I am in a conspiracy against Mountjoy the smuggler?"

"I intimate nothing, sir, but you can take my words with any meaning you deem fit to put upon them, only as you have an unsettled affair with Mountjoy on hand, pray attend to that before resenting what I may say."

"What! do you expect me to fight a duel with an outlaw?"

"You have not proven him such yet, only hold him on suspicion, with, I admit, appearances very much against him; but should you fail to prove your charge, you have to meet the man you will again have wronged, and if you consider that I have insulted you, then you may demand an apology of me, or satisfaction."

"Now, sir, I must ask you for the permits for Mrs. Mountjoy and myself to visit the prisoner."

Fred Spruel muttered a curse, but wrote the passes, and thanking him politely, the soldier left the office.

"Vail, what do you think of that?" he asked savagely, when Deering had gone.

"He bullied you."

"Could I do otherwise with old Nevitte hanging over me to grant the permits if I refused, and give me a sound damning in the bargain for not knowing my duty, for I have no right to refuse?"

"I do not see that you could have done otherwise; but that fellow is as smart as a college graduate and knows what he is about, while he is dangerous also and full of fight."

"A blind man could see that," growled Spruel.

"Yes, and we must go slow in this affair or Mountjoy will be made a martyr of."

"We? Say yourself, for I have been simply doing my duty in capturing two vessels that I saw together at sea exchanging contraband goods."

"This is your plot, not mine, Ezra Vail."

"Yes, my plot, and your work, and I pay and you receive."

"So be it, I will pay the price when the work is done, Captain Spruel."

"See that you do, and more, see that you do not compromise me," and in an angry mood Captain Spruel left the office and returned to his vessel to learn that Captain Herbert Deering was then with Mark Mountjoy, the alleged smuggler.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ACCUSED.

WHEN Captain Herbert Deering left the office of Ezra Vail & Co, he went, as has been seen, to the Government wharf and asked to see Mark Mountjoy, showing his pass to do so.

The officer in charge looked surprised, for Captain Spruel had told him he would permit no one to see the "Smuggler Captain" as Mark Mountjoy was already called.

But there was no doubting the permit, when borne by Herbert Deering, and he was allowed to go on board the Winged Arrow where the prisoner was held in his cabin.

"Ah, Deering, this is kind of you and I thank you, for appearances seem so against me, from hearing one side of the story, I almost feared you would think I was after all an outlaw," and Mark Mountjoy grasped the outstretched hand of the young soldier and wrung it with a force that showed he appreciated the coming of his friend.

"I was at home and had not heard of the capture until Mrs. Mountjoy came up to The Harborage and made it known to my aunt and myself."

"She tried to see you also, but met Captain Spruel and was refused."

"Bless the little woman, I knew she would; but I am sorry she was repulsed."

"Oh, I was also, but I went to see Captain Spruel and after a little talk with him he was so well convinced that it was best for him to let me see you, that I obtained a permit, and one also for your wife, who will visit you to-morrow."

"Ever kind are you, Herbert Deering," said Mountjoy with emotion.

"No, I try to be just; but what does your capture mean?"

"Appearances are against me as you will see; but I am not guilty except in the eyes of those who wish me to be."

"I sailed with a fair wind, and south of Naugus Head sighted a sloop which gave signals of distress."

"I ran down to her and found she was sinking from a very bad leak, and her captain begged me to take himself, crew and a small but very valuable cargo on board, which I did."

"Then the skipper said he might save his vessel, so with his men returned to her to go into Marblehead if possible, while I held on my course once more to be brought to by a shot from the Vidette, which had run down upon us unseen, having been hiding behind Lowell Island watching the sloop, for it had been reported to Captain Spruel as a smuggler, and that

was what had taken him to sea so suddenly in the afternoon.

"He captured the crew and recognized them as smugglers, and it seems the chief said he had transferred his cargo to my vessel and did not say why, and that got me into this scrape."

"I was put in irons with my crew, and the smugglers, and brought in here; but I hope there will be no trouble about my proving my innocence at my trial."

"Such is my story, Deering."

"And I believe it word for word, though under the circumstances I cannot censure Spruel."

"Nor I."

"Unless—"

"What?"

"He seems very determined to run you down as an outlaw, and unless these men, this smuggler crew, have lied about you, anxious to complicate matters so as to aid themselves, I do not see why he should not believe your story."

"They have done so."

"Then it is his duty to hold you; but my great-uncle, General Nevitte, will be at The Harborage to-night and remain some days, so I will have him see that there is no delay in your trial, and also hear your case as I believe it to be."

"The general commands this department you know, and though stern is most just, and he is very kind toward me, so you may rest contented that he shall know all the facts of the case."

"But I must go now, for your wife awaits with my aunt my report, and I shall take a hand in this affair myself, so keep up heart and believe you have friends who will not desert you."

"I know it."

And thus they parted, the soldier going ashore and rapidly wending his way back to The Harborage.

He found both Alma and his aunt anxiously awaiting his return, and they listened to his story of the affair, as he had heard it from the lips of Mark Mountjoy, with the deepest interest.

"I knew poor Mark was innocent," said Alma with tears in her eyes.

"I feel so too, my dear; but, Herbert, it looks to me as though Captain Spruel was pushing Captain Mountjoy from other motives than a sense of duty," Miss Kittredge said.

"I suggested as much to him, Aunt Jessie; but I shall take good care to see justice done."

"Do so, and remember to seek my aid when needed in any way."

"You are so good, so kind to us; but some day we may be able to prove our appreciation," said Alma, and Herbert Deering having told her that he had gotten a permit for her to visit her husband the following morning, and that he should call for her and escort her there, she took leave and returned to Ivy Lodge to find what comfort she could in her two children and her household affairs.

Soon after Alma's departure from The Harborage, General Nevitte arrived.

He was a handsome, stern-faced old gentleman of sixty, with the carriage of the perfect soldier and manners that were courtly though reserved.

Miss Kittredge and Herbert Deering were his favorite kindred, and he was always happy when at The Harborage.

That night he heard the story of the Mountjoys, and ever prompt, he dispatched a special messenger before midnight to Portsmouth with a letter to Commandant Hunnewell, requesting an immediate trial for the prisoners held as smugglers, and suggesting that as far as the skipper and crew of the Winged Arrow were concerned, he believed them the victims of having been captured under suspicious circumstances.

Herbert Deering went down-town to dispatch a messenger himself with the letter, and after seeing him off returned home in a very cheerful mood at having enlisted the general as the friend of the accused.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A CLEVER PLOT.

MIDSHIPMAN BEN THOMAS was pacing to and fro on the deck of the smuggler sloop, when a boat came off toward him rowing rapidly and containing but one man.

"Boat ahoy!"

At his hail came the answer as the man stopped rowing and turned his face toward him:

"Ay, ay, sir, a letter from the captain to Midshipman Thomas."

"Come alongside."

This the man did, and springing on board the sloop handed a note to the young officer with the remark:

"I met the captain in the town, sir, and he wrote this to you, sir, being as you were near our craft."

The midshipman stepped to the light from the cabin companionway and read:

"Take your two best men and go up the harbor to the brig Elgin, on board of which the bearer of this reports trouble with the crew."

"The bearer will go on to the Vidette and have an officer and boat's crew follow you as soon as possible."

SPRUEL.

"I will go at once, my man; but what is the trouble?"

"It is with the mate and the men, sir; but I slipped away to come and get officers, and met the captain who went into the inn and wrote this note to you."

"I will go on now, sir, after others."

"Do so, and don't delay," and the midshipman called to two of his four men and told them to arm themselves and accompany him, while the messenger from the brig Elgin went away in his boat toward the Government wharf at which lay the Vidette and which was a considerable distance from where the sloop lay at anchor.

Hardly had the sloop's boat disappeared when the messenger returned and was hailed by the man on watch.

"A message from the Vidette."

"Ay, ay."

The man again stepped on the sloop's deck, and said:

"The officer has already gone?"

"Yes."

"May I ask if you have not served out your time?"

"We has, and is kept for a few days over, as the schooner is short of men, and we don't like it," was the sullen response.

"Well, my man, you and your mate are under no pledge to remain, and if you can make a hundred or so by going, you ought to do so."

"But there's no way to make it, going or staying."

"Oh, yes, there is, for just get that anchor up and set sail and here's your money."

"Run off with the sloop?"

"Yes."

"And the prisoners?" asked the other man.

"That's my idea, and there is no reason that the poor fellows should go behind iron bars because they sought to make a little money."

"They have families to care for, and if you want to help them, I have the gold right here for you; but if you do not, then I have iron instead of gold, and you can take your choice."

As the man spoke he held out a bag of gold in one hand and a pistol in the other.

"We hain't armed, so we takes the gold; but we'd a heap rather you'd pay us, and then put us in irons and into the boat."

"It would look better you know, for we could say as how we was overpowered."

"All right, there is no time to lose, so here goes."

The man acted promptly, and he seemed to come well prepared, for he took the irons from his pocket, and in an instant the men were secured.

"Now the smugglers are below?"

"Yes sir."

"In irons?"

"Yes, but the keys is in the cabin, sir."

These were secured, and in a couple of minutes the smugglers were on deck, the two seamen were hustled into the boat of the bold rescuer and it was anchored, and the sloop was the next moment flying down the harbor toward the open sea.

The young midshipman, meanwhile, had gone on up the harbor in search of the brig Elgin.

He found some difficulty in the darkness finding the brig, but at last did so, and boarded her.

To his amazement he found all quiet on board.

"Is not this the brig Elgin?"

"Yes, sir," said the mate, politely, recognizing the uniform of an officer.

"What is the trouble on board?"

"There is no trouble on board, sir."

"Come, sir, no trifling after sending for me to come on board and quell a mutiny."

"Quell a mutiny on this vessel, sir?"

"Yes."

"There has been no mutiny, sir, for I have been on deck since eight bells, and the captain is asleep in his cabin."

"By Heaven, I have been fooled then, or this is not the craft," said Midshipman Ben Thomas.

"This is the Elgin, sir."

"Is there no other brig at anchor up here?"

"No, sir; there are several schooners and a few small sloops."

"I do not understand this at all; but I have here a letter from my captain, telling me to come on board the brig Elgin, and quell trouble of some kind."

"Beg pardon, sir, but may it not be a trick to free the sloop, sir," said one of the two seamen who accompanied the midshipman.

"By Neptune! Broles, you may be right."

"Into the boat, and we'll return with all speed."

The order was promptly obeyed, and the boat went along at a rattling pace.

The pull was a long one, and when at last they reached the anchorage of the sloop, there was the boat only to be found, and in it the two men in irons.

They both told the same story, how a boat with half a dozen men had come aboard, answering the hail with:

"Boat from the Vidette."

Not until they were seized did they suspect treachery, and then they were ironed, hustled into the boat and left there, while the sloop had

gone seaward, at first under light sail, but gradually spreading all canvas as she went along.

Midshipman Ben Thomas was in an angry mood, and he had but one thing to do, and that was to take the boat in tow with the two men in irons, and go to the Vidette to report what had occurred.

Captain Spruel had dined at the tavern with Captain Ezra Vail, and having indulged a little too freely, he was not easily awakened.

It was some time before he was able to understand the situation.

But there was his own writing, apparently, and he said to himself:

"I could almost swear that it was mine; but you have been duped, Thomas, though I cannot hold you to blame under the circumstances."

"Go on board the other prize, the Winged Arrow, for she is the fleetest thing in these waters, and give chase."

"How long has the sloop been gone?"

"Just one hour and a half ago, sir, I left the sloop on my fool's errand."

"And by the time you get well under way it will be two hours' start for the sloop."

"Yes, sir."

"How is the wind?"

"Off-shore, sir, and blowing six knots."

"Then the sloop has three leagues the lead; but go at once, and if you cannot find her in a couple of days, return."

"I will go to sea in the morning on the search also."

Midshipman Thomas saluted and hastily left the Vidette, leaving the two men still in irons on board for the captain to deal with, and greatly, too, to their alarm, for they had expected to be at once set free when they told their plausible story.

Meanwhile Middy Thomas soon reported on board the Winged Arrow, and the lieutenant in command got the schooner's anchor up and sails set with wonderful alacrity, for it would be a feather in his cap to catch the escaped smuggler craft.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FUGITIVE SLOOP.

ARMED with her pass, and accompanied by Captain Herbert Deering, the next morning, Alma sought the Government wharf, and was admitted to the schooner to see her husband.

Herbert Deering remained outside of the state-room in which Mountjoy was consigned, so as to allow the wife to see her unfortunate husband alone.

For half an hour she remained there and then bade the marine on guard to send for Captain Deering.

That officer was chatting on deck with some of the officers of the schooner, who were wondering at his deep interest in the fate of Mountjoy the smuggler.

He promptly obeyed the summons, and after greeting Mountjoy, said:

"I have news for you."

"Yes, sir."

"The smuggler sloop escaped last night."

Mountjoy started, and asked quickly:

"How could she do that?"

"I noticed considerable excitement as we came along, and wondered what it was all about; but Lieutenant Volney of the Vidette just told me of the sloop's escape and how it occurred, and a most clever trick it was," and the soldier told the story, adding:

"The schooner, your vessel, under an officer and crew from the Vidette, at once went in chase, though the sloop had had several leagues start, and Spruel intended also to go this morning, but heard from an incoming craft that the Winged Arrow was in hot chase of the smuggler down the coast, so knew she would be retaken."

"Yes, she will be if they know how to get the Arrow's speed out of her, for I do not know her equal on the coast."

"But the rescue was a daring one, and showed that the smugglers had friends here in the town to so soon release them," Mountjoy said:

"Yes, and they acted promptly; but I had a long talk with my great-uncle, General Nevitte, last night about you."

"Ah! and he believes I am guilty, I fear."

"He says what I do, that appearances are against you, Mountjoy, but he admits that appearances are often wrong, and he sent a special messenger last night at twelve to Portsmouth, with a strong letter to Captain Hunnewell, ordering an immediate trial of yourself and crew, and you will find him your friend."

"I owe this to you, Deering."

"Well, I cannot see that you owe me very much, for you forget the debt due you from me, the debt of life."

"Do not speak of it."

"It is not a thing to so readily forget; but at any rate, Mountjoy, we three at The Harborage are your friends."

"Now, Mrs. Mountjoy, as we have overstayed our time, we had better depart."

Alma told Mark farewell with a brave face, and under the escort of Captain Deering left the ship.

Her beauty had been spoken of, and all the officers on board had assembled on deck to see her depart, and saluted the army officer most politely as he escorted her ashore.

"She is a beauty, and no mistake," the surgeon remarked, with the air of one who had diagnosed her fine points at a glance and so settled the matter.

"Pretty! well, I should think so," another remarked.

"She has a lovely face, indeed."

"And such a form!"

"Such exquisite teeth!"

"What glorious eyes!"

"And a smuggler's wife!"

"A lady to the manner born!"

"What a pity to be an outlaw's wife!"

"Hold on, Cruse, he is not yet tried and found guilty."

"He is only an alleged smuggler," said Lieutenant Volney, and there was a significance in his words which several present only seemed to comprehend, and they smiled knowingly.

"He'll be found guilty if the captain can have it so," bluntly blurted out the old sailing-master, and his words seemed to be the keynote to the situation.

As the soldier and his lovely charge left the wharf, they came face to face upon Captain Fred Spruel and Ezra Vail.

The two bowed coldly to the soldier and Alma and then, after a word to Ezra Vail, Captain Spruel called out:

"May I see you after a while, Captain Deering, upon a matter of importance?"

"Yes, sir, now, for Mrs. Mountjoy no longer needs my services as an escort," and bidding her good-morning and to keep up courage, Herbert Deering turned and joined the naval officer and the whaler captain.

"I suppose you have heard of the cutting-out of the smuggler sloop last night, sir?"

"Yes, Captain Spruel, I learned it on board your vessel just now."

"It was a daring plot and cleverly executed, while I can lay no censure at the door of Midshipman Thomas, but regret I did not put the five prisoners on board the schooner."

"But what I wished to know, sir, is whether General Navitte is in town?"

"He is at the home of my aunt, sir."

"It is so far to Portsmouth, to communicate with Captain Hunnewell, I would like to ask if I could report to General Nevitte, and receive orders and advice from him, if you would be so good as to ask him for me."

"I will answer for the general, sir, having been appointed his personal aide and placed on duty this morning, sir."

The two hearers looked surprised.

They knew the value of such an appointment, and the honor it carried with it.

They also knew that it advanced the rank of the aide from that of captain to major, and Captain Spruel suddenly found himself confronted by his superior in rank in the service of his country.

As the special aide of General Nevitte, not to speak of being his great-nephew and heir, the young officer would have almost unlimited powers.

Fred Spruel was not equal to the occasion, but Ezra Vail was, so said with a pleasant smile:

"Another promotion for you, sir, and so soon, too."

"Permit me to congratulate you—Major Deering, I take it to be?"

"Yes; thank you, Captain Vail, for your congratulations upon my promotion again, which certainly was not deserved."

"And accept my congratulations also, Major Deering," said Spruel.

Herbert Deering bowed an acknowledgment and then said:

"I will receive your report, Captain Spruel, and submit it to the general."

"But have you no clew to the perpetrators of this deed?"

"None, sir; but as I learn from a vessel that came in early, the schooner Winged Arrow, which I sent in pursuit last night, was in full chase, and will overhaul and capture her without a doubt."

"I trust so, sir, for much depends upon the recapture of those men on the sloop, to sustain the innocence of Mountjoy and his crew in their trial."

"You still think he is innocent, sir?"

"I am sure of it; but of course you did your duty, surprising him as you did, and with the report of the skipper of the sloop."

"I will be at The Harborage, Captain Spruel, to receive your report."

"I will send it, sir, within the hour; but do you think I should go to sea in pursuit?"

"The time to have done so was last night, sir, along with the schooner, so to have searched up and down the coast; now it is too late, and the schooner will doubtless capture the smuggler, if in chase, for she is faster than the Vidette, I believe."

Fred Spruel winced under this double shot against his dereliction of duty, and at the speed of his vessel, which he was most boastful of; but he made no reply, bowed, and the two

friends parted with the handsome young officer, who bore his high honors so moderately.

"Those two men do not appear to be congenial companions, and yet they are inseparable."

"What is the bond of sympathy between them?"

"Can it be Mountjoy, for I am sure both of them hate him intensely," and thus a new vein of thought was opened in the mind of Major Herbert Deering.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NOT IN THE SECRET.

"WELL, Vail, that is against us," said Fred Spruel, as he walked on with the whaler captain, after leaving Major Deering.

"If you mean Deering's promotion to the staff, and the presence of this old general here, it is."

"I mean that he will have unlimited power now, so close to the general, and if he suspects only—"

"Bah! what can he suspect?"

"I mean about us."

"Well, what can he suspect about us?"

"That we are leagued against Captain Mountjoy."

"Nonsense! He cannot suspect what does not exist."

"Why, it is but your guilty conscience, Spruel!"

"A guilty conscience about what does not exist?"

"Ah, good for you! Why, I did not suspect you of being half so bright."

"But the thing in a nutshell is, that I hate Mountjoy, and wish to see him caught, imprisoned—yes, hanged if possible."

"You owe me money, and wish to give your work to square your debt."

"I told you to catch Mountjoy smuggling, and you were worsted by him at first, but now have him safe and sound, and can send him to prison, for you caught him with smuggled goods on his vessel, and which he took from a self-confessed smuggler, who reported to you that he gave the goods to Mountjoy, to run in with them, and dispose of them."

"Is this a conspiracy?"

"It does not look so, now I see your view of it!"

"No, and you are not responsible for the escape of the sloop."

"I may be made so."

"Oh, no, for you anchored her where there was room for her, and where the crowds would keep away."

"An officer and four seamen were left on board as a guard, and the five prisoners were in irons in the hold."

"A boat comes with a note from you to your officer, telling him that there is trouble on a brig and to hasten there."

"Who can make wrong out of that?"

"The writing was a forgery, but that relieves you and the middy."

"Then a boat, so say the two men, boarded the sloop and put them in irons."

"They lie there, but that is—well, I'll not put you at a disadvantage by saying more on that subject."

"But the sloop escapes, and you send the fleetest craft in these waters in chase."

"Now where is there a league in that to hurt Mountjoy, or, at least, who can make a conspiracy out of it?"

"I only spoke from our trouble with Mountjoy."

"Your trouble, you mean, for I had none."

"True; but that may go against me."

"Again you are wrong, for the trouble did not appear as your seeking."

"He sent the challenge, and, who knows this better than our friend Deering himself?"

"I had not thought of that."

"Well, you must think, for a man in your situation must keep his wits about him."

"Now go on board and write your report, and I will glance it over to see that you don't give any secrets away, for the old general is as sharp as his great-nephew, I can tell you."

They walked on to the schooner, and the report of the cutting out of the smuggler sloop was written and submitted to Captain Vail, who said:

"Better than I expected of you, for I supposed you would give suspicious details."

"Now dispatch it and we'll talk business."

"Business?"

"Yes, but get rid of that report first."

This was done, an officer being dispatched with the document up to The Harborage.

"Now, Spruel, I believe you owe me just two thousand dollars?"

"Your frequent reference to it should keep the amount fresh in your memory."

"Ah! good, very good; but I wished to say to you that, as you have carried out your part of our contract, I wish to also do the same."

"Whether the trial is for or against Mountjoy, you have done your duty, so I return to you your receipt for the money, and that cancels the debt you owe me."

"Indeed I thank you, Vail."

"No, you need not thank me, for it is but

justice to you, and that is not half what the capture of Mountjoy as a smuggler has cost me."

"If the sloop is retaken, then, unless she can again escape, it will cost me much more, her value, the value of her cargo and—but here I go, betraying secrets again to you, and which of course you feel not a shadow of interest in."

"Now let me ask you what you intend to do about Mountjoy?"

"Try him."

"True, but upon what charges?"

"Smuggling and outlawry."

"You may have to give your authority for believing him to be a smuggler."

"Ah yes, yourself."

"That is the point, for I do not wish to be known in the case."

"Who shall I give then?"

"Let me see," said Ezra Vail, thoughtfully.

"Your confidential clerk, Laws?"

"Oh, no, for I wish him to know just so much and no more."

"I fear his head could not contain too many secrets, for they might set his tongue to wagging."

"True."

"I trust no man fully, Spruel."

"Thank you."

"Yes, not even you, for all men, in my opinion, and it is worth a great deal to Ezra Vail, whatever it may be to others, have their price."

"Egad, I almost begin to think so too," laughed Captain Spruel, who with two thousand dollars canceled, and the feeling that he had captured a smuggler, and covered up his tracks of hatred against Mountjoy, felt in a very good humor.

"I know it, for honor and dishonor are marketable commodities I have found, not only for sale by men but by women as well."

"But we were discussing this case of Mountjoy."

"Ah, yes, as to who was your informant."

"True."

"What were the dates of your sailing in chase of Mountjoy on both occasions?"

Spruel gave the date of his first chase, and that of a couple of days before.

"I have it."

"Well?"

"I will write you two letters, signed simply 'An Avenging Sailor,' or 'An Ex-Smuggler,' giving you supposed secret information against Mountjoy."

"These shall be strong enough for you to have acted upon, and pretend to come from one who has a cause of grievance against Mountjoy."

"A good idea, and I can show these in court?"

"Yes, but the second one will be simply telling you to go to sea and lie in wait near Lowell's Island for a smuggler sloop to be joined off the coast by a confederate craft."

"I understand, and this shows why I sailed on the day appointed for the duel."

"It will, and I will give you the letters to-morrow."

"Don't forget, for I put much confidence in them to help me out."

"I'll not forget, so drop in to-morrow."

"Now I must be off; but if the schooner brings the sloop back, notify me at once, for I shall have work to do."

"You will keep hinting at what I should not know, Vail."

"I forget that we are not both in the affair together, that it is my hatred against Mountjoy, and you are only doing your duty as a Government officer."

"I'll be more careful in future—adieu!" and with a sneer in his manner the whaler captain left the schooner, to meet his clerk, Justin Laws, who whispered something to him and the two hastened away together in the direction of the office of Vail & Company.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHAT A STRANGER OVERHEARD.

SINCE he had become the confidential clerk of Captain Ezra Vail, the senior partner and full manager of the rich whaling and shipping firm of Vail & Company, Mr. Justin Laws had begun to put on airs, not to his employer was it, but to his fellow clerks and others with whom he came in contact.

He had always been a hard working man, industrious to a fault, and though known to be very fond of laying by his spare change, for a rainy day, he said, he had not been unpopular.

But with his salary increased considerably and often called into the private office for consultation with his employer, Mr. Laws had gotten enlarged ideas.

He showed it to his fellow clerks by his condescension toward them when addressed, and at his boarding house he was wont to turn up his nose at what had formerly been his favorite dish.

And all this was on account of Captain Ezra Vail calling him to a special service which strictly speaking was not business.

He had paid him well, and Mr. Laws felt that he was getting up in the world.

He was looking over his ledgers, the day that Captain Vail returned to Fred Spruel his due-bill "for services rendered," when a man entered the office and asked to see the senior partner.

"He is out at present, sir, but if you will take a seat Captain Vail will soon be in," said a clerk politely.

His words reached the ears of Justin Laws, and he called out sternly:

"Mr. Martin, what do you know of the senior partner, sir?"

"Nothing at all, so do not take upon yourself to answer, but ask me, sir."

Mr. Martin fell back abashed, and the visitor came up to Justin Laws, who leant back in his chair, frowned and put on a look of intense importance.

"Well, old Know-it-all, where is your master the captain?" asked the visitor with a rude laugh.

Mr. Laws thought that he heard the laugh echoed by the clerks, but he had no time to investigate then, for the stranger confronted him with a look that was not prepossessing.

He was a sailor without doubt, and had evidently been drinking, which gave him an ugly look about the eyes which quite awed the confidential clerk, who said in a voice that belied his words:

"How dare you speak thus to me, sir, to me, Justin Laws?"

The visitor again laughed and replied:

"Mate, you don't want to open fire on me, but to tell me where your master is, for I have business with him."

"Begone, sir."

In answer the individual responded:

"That gentleman yonder asked me to sit down and wait, so I shall do so."

With this he threw himself into an easy-chair, and perfectly disgusted, Justin Laws got up, seized his hat and left the office.

He went in search of his employer to come and deal with the dangerous-looking man; in truth he fled the field and the suppressed laughter of his fellow clerks at his retreat caused his face to flush with shame and anger.

He thought he knew where to find him, and he was right, for he met him on his way from the Vidette.

"You should have put the fellow out," said Captain Ezra Vail, when he had heard Justin Laws's story, with certain embellishments, of the stranger waiting at the office.

"I preferred to leave him to you, sir," was Mr. Laws's response.

So Captain Ezra Vail entered his office and saw the visitor, who had been affording amusement for the clerks at the expense of Mr. Laws.

"Is that him?" asked the sailor, towering to his full height, when the whaler merchant entered, with Laws in his wake.

He addressed the clerks in general, but one answered innocently:

"There is Captain Vail now, sir."

The man looked at him as though taking his measure and asked rudely:

"Are you Ezra Vail?"

"I am," was the quiet reply.

"Then I've got an order on you and I want it attended to mighty quick, for I'm no man to trifle with, as you'll find."

"Nor am I," and straight from the shoulder went the right arm of Ezra Vail, and the doubled fist met the face of the stranger with a force that sent him his length upon the floor partially stunned.

And on into his private office passed the whaler, while the visitor, with his face bleeding, arose and looked around him in a half-dazed way.

Then his eyes became wicked in their expression, and he strode toward the door of the private office.

"Better not go in there, for the captain's a bad man to arouse," whispered a clerk.

"I have discovered that," was the answer; but the man went on his way, and opening the door, said, with marked politeness:

"May I speak to you, sir?"

"Certainly, if you have business with me; but beware, for I'll stand no trifling, and if you have come here for trouble, you can be accommodated."

"I know when I've got enough," was the answer.

"Then tell me what you have come for."

"I have an order on you for five hundred dollars."

"Indeed! And from whom?"

"From myself."

"Ah, and who are you?"

"Nick Norcross is my name, and I am the mate o' Will Wilder."

"Ah! I cannot congratulate Mr. Wilder upon his comrades."

"But did he send you to me?"

"He did not exactly; but he was to do certain work, and if he and his men got caught, then I, for five hundred dollars, was to set them free."

"That was my arrangement with him, and I did it."

"Well, what have I to do with that?"

"Only that he said you were to pay him for his work, and he would pay me."

"Now, he expected to be caught, I guess, for we plotted his escape before we left, and I went through my part of the work without a hitch, and was landed on the harbor shore when all went well."

"Now I learn from a craft that ran in here this morning that Will Wilder's sloop was being chased by the schooner sent in pursuit of her, and would surely be taken."

"I cannot help Will a second time, and as I did so once, I am entitled to my pay, so come to you to get it."

Captain Ezra Vail listened quietly, but there was an evil glitter in his eyes and a dangerous smile upon his face.

"Is that all?" he asked, with the utmost calmness.

"It is."

"And what was this craft, and who was this Will Wilder?"

"You know well enough what his craft is and who he is."

"Do I?"

"You do."

"And he told you he was to get his money from me?"

"I'll be square with you; he did not."

"Why did you come to me then?"

"Come, I want the truth?"

"I know'd you was the man."

"For what?"

"To pay the money."

"How did you know it?"

"I heard Will Wilder and old bald-head in yonder making the arrangement."

"You overheard them?"

"Yes."

"Any one else hear them?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"Not a soul, for it was in Will's room at Marblehead, and he thought I had gone out, but I was hiding behind the curtain, for I wanted to see if he was going to play double on me; but he did not, for when your mate yonder had gone he went out to look me up, and he told me what I have said, only he would not mention any name, but that I had overheard, so you need not blame Will."

"And you heard my name?"

"Well, yonder figure-head said he wanted the work done, but told Will he was head clerk in your firm in Salem, and I knew he was only a tool for you to work with, so I came to you to bluff the money out of you."

"Well, Mr. Nick Norcross, you must know that I do not care to have you come here as you did, and to pay you before my clerks would look as though you had forced me to pay you for some underhand work."

"So, come here to-night at ten, and I will pass by and let you in, and get you the money, for you did do your work well."

"But mind you, if you come here drunk, or if you appear to have been drinking, not a dollar shall you have."

"Now go, and be on the opposite side of the street at the hour named, and when you see me unlock my door and enter, come across and I'll admit you, but speak to no one about it."

"I'll be as close as a clam, sir," and Nick Norcross departed, but the look in his face was one of sheer devilry while he muttered:

"No, I'll tell no one, and I'll be on hand, and when you let me into your office I'll see that I get more money than the five hundred, and avenge that blow you gave me too, Ezra Vail."

CHAPTER XL. THE MEETING.

CAPTAIN VAIL was punctual, for the commander of the Vidette had been visiting him at his pleasant rooms in the inn, and he accompanied the young sailor on his return to his ship, saying that he had some work to do and wished to get some papers from his private office to refer to.

The two parted near the Vail wharf, and while the captain of the cruiser went on toward his vessel the whaler turned up the dark and deserted street where his office was situated.

He walked slowly, his eyes on the alert, and as he drew near his door he muttered:

"He is there."

The street was solely one for business houses, and not a dwelling was within two blocks, so no one was near to see either the merchant or the waiting sailor.

Before leaving the inn Captain Vail had asked Landlord Hastings for a messenger to send to the home of Mr. Laws, for him to get the important papers, for what he wished to write must leave by the early morning stage.

Then Captain Vail had said that he "would not disturb poor tired Laws, but go himself."

Thus it was he went part of the way with Captain Spruel.

Opening the office door he stepped within.

All was dark there, but he had come prepared with a lantern which he had gotten from the landlord and carried under his coat.

Hardly had he entered when a form rapidly crossed the street and stepped into the door.

"I'm here, cap'n."

"So I see; come in."

The door was closed behind him and locked, and then Captain Vail led the way back to his private office.

The lantern lighted their way, and by it he lit a lamp in the office.

"Well, you are sober, I see," said the merchant, calmly.

"Painfully so, cap'n," returned the man with a leer.

"And you want five hundred dollars?"

"Got to have it, mate."

"Well, I'll have to get the money out of the safe."

"I don't care where you gets it from, so I lay hands on it."

"Just wait here until I return, for I wish to see that no one is about."

"These are perilous times, you know, and burglars are about."

"I has heard so; but don't stay long."

"No, I'll return shortly," and the merchant took up his lantern, and went into the large, outer office.

There was a window upon one side, opening into an alley.

This he opened quietly.

Then he went to the safe, and placed by it a few tools, a dark lantern, and a bunch of keys.

Returning to the inner office, he said to the sailor who was impatiently awaiting him:

"Suppose I could not give you that money to-night?"

"Say, mate, no tricks now, for I hain't one to fool with."

"But I have not my keys with me as I supposed, my clerk having them."

"That's a game of bluff, for you hain't no fool, and you won't find me one neither."

"I wants the gold, and if you don't pay to-night, I'll talk to-morrow."

"You will talk?"

"Yes."

"What will you say?"

"I'll let it be known that the rich merchant, Ezra Vail, is making his money by being in league with smugglers, and set up a job, too, upon a young skipper, who is in his way, I guess."

"That's what I'll talk, mate, so if you wish my tongue to keep still, just put a gold weight onto it, that's all."

"And that is all I want to know, my fine fellow, for I expected as much from you. Take that!"

The right hand of the whaler suddenly shot forward, a sharp report rung out and echoed through the offices, and the sailor fell heavily to the floor.

Springing forward, the merchant seized from the man's breast-pocket a pistol, and fixed it in the direction in which he had stood, and then he sent a second bullet from his own pistol in quick succession into the brain of the sailor, who was writhing in agony from the one that had pierced his heart.

"Now to give myself up," said Ezra Vail, with unruffled mien, and he left his office, and wended his way to the town jail.

The next morning the town paper had the following account of the tragedy:

"A BURGLAR SHOT!"

"CAPTAIN EZRA VAIL'S MIDNIGHT FIGHT FOR LIFE!"

"ONE ROBBER LESS!"

"Last night, soon after ten o'clock, our esteemed merchant, Captain Ezra Vail, presented himself at the town jail and surrendered himself to the constable for having taken human life."

"He told his story in an unmoved manner, showing wonderful nerve for a man who had just had a fight for life."

"The story of Captain Vail is to the effect that Captain Spruel of the Vidette had been spending the evening with him, and having some letters to send off by the early mail, and finding he had to refer to papers in his office, he escorted the commander of the cruiser nearly to his ship."

"Having secured a lantern from Landlord Hastings, where he is stopping, Captain Vail entered his office to be confronted by a man who was endeavoring to force open the iron safe in the outer office."

"The robber retreated to the inner office. Captain Vail pursuing and demanding his surrender, to be suddenly met by a shot which fortunately missed him and buried itself in the door behind him."

"Fortunate also was it for Captain Vail that he was armed, or his life would have been the forfeit, for ere the bold burglar could fire the second time the captain shot him in the breast, and was again forced to shoot him as he rushed upon him knife in hand."

"This time the shot was in the head, and the robber fell dead in his tracks."

"Captain Vail then delivered himself up, and going to the office with the constable, the window opening on the alley was found open, showing how the man had entered, and lying by the safe were several tools and a dark-lantern."

"Captain Vail was allowed to go on his own recognition to appear to-day, and the community owe him thanks for having rid the town of a bad and dangerous character."

Such was the story as told by the paper, and when brought before the justice. Captain Ezra Vail was at once discharged upon the plea of "justifiable homicide in self-defense," and was thanked for the valuable service rendered to

the community, while the man was recognized as the visitor to the office of Vail & Co. the day before.

But if the community had only known the true story of the tragedy, Ezra Vail would not have been the hero he was looked upon as being.

But the deed was hidden under the shadows of the night, and "a dangerous man" to the rich merchant was removed out of his path.

CHAPTER XLI.

MR. LAWS'S CUNNING PLOT.

NICK NORCROSS had told the truth, strange as it may seem, for he was a man who avoided veracity where a lie would do as well.

He had been a never-do-well sort of a fellow, and only because Mr. Wilder owed him his life, had he taken him under his protection.

When out of money, and he could borrow no more, Nick Norcross went to work and when paid off went on a spree.

He found his quarters when ashore at Will Wilder's rooms in Marblehead.

Will Wilder was a thorough sailor, had laid by some little money, and took life comfortably.

He owned a sloop in which he sometimes went on short coasting voyages, carrying freight or passengers, as there was a demand for.

The sloop was a rapid sailer, stanch and comfortable, and her skipper was proud of her.

One day Mr. Will Wilder had a call from a boyhood chum.

It was Mr. Justin Laws, the confidential clerk of Vail & Co.

They had a long talk together, and the result of it was that Will Wilder said:

"Of course I'll serve you, Justin, for old times' sake, and I want the money as well."

"I suppose because we were once engaged together in a questionable affair in our old home in Maine, you came to me to do this job; but I am glad that you did."

"I'll not take my sloop, of course, for I do not wish her mixed up in any shaky transactions; but I'll go to Boston and charter one and get a strange crew also, while, if I shave off my long beard and wear a light-haired wig, no one will know me, if seen, as Will Wilder."

"Then, too, I can arrange for the escape of myself and crew, for I know the very man to help us out, and it must be done quick."

"Where am I to get the goods?"

"I'll give you an order on our Boston firm for what you wish, but they are only make-believe smuggled, you know, merely to carry out a certain end I have in view."

"All right, they shall not be lost, but you must take the risk of their being removed from the sloop when captured."

"I'll do that."

"Who are you with now?"

"Confidential clerk for Ezra Vail and Company of Salem."

"Ah! very rich firm, and I guess you are the Company, if the truth were known."

"You were always a sly dog, Justin."

The plans of operation were then all gone over between the two, and this was the conversation which Nick Norcross overheard, as he had told Captain Vail.

After Justin Laws had gone, Will Wilder sought Nick Norcross and told him as much as it was necessary to know, adding:

"Now, Nick, I know your cunning and courage, and you must pledge me to keep sober and you can make three hundred dollars clean money out by your work."

"I'm yer man, Will, and I'll pledge you not to drink."

"It's a bargain, then, so go at once to Salem and get acquainted with the surroundings there, the harbor and all else."

"When the cruiser brings in some prizes as smugglers, you are to have all in readiness to aid our escape, mine especially."

"Here are a hundred dollars for you to live on and feel your way, and if you have to use money to get us free, why go to Justin Laws with Vail and Company and hand him this slip of paper, and he'll give you what is needed," and Will Wilder handed to Nick a paper on which was written:

"OLD TIME MATE:—

"Pay to my agent what money he needs to aid in the good work."

W. W.—Marblehead."

Nick Norcross at once started for Salem and Will Wilder went to Boston.

There he got a sloop, and a lot of goods, with a crew of four men whose lawless career he seemed to be acquainted with, and with his long black beard shaved off clean, and his black hair cut close and a wig of blonde, curling hair falling upon his shoulders, no one would have known Will Wilder as the man by that name from Marblehead.

When prepared he set sail, and a couple of auger-holes, with plugs all ready to stop the leak, gave him an opportunity to play "sinking ship," while an extra pump would enable him to soon get the water out of the sloop's hold when he wished to do so.

It was a cunning trick, devilishly arranged and plotted by Mr. Justin Laws, and he had put it into the hands of a bold man to carry out.

And Will Wilder had taken all chances, and more, had put his rescue into the daring hands of Nick Norcross.

Wilder had been a lawless fellow, interested in certain "shady" voyages, but he was true as steel to a friend, and would rather die than do what he thought mean.

He had a certain sense of honor, and held to it, while he considered his lawless voyages as fair game against the Government.

Such was the man who had been rescued by Nick Norcross, with sloop and crew, and to the credit of Nick be it said he had plotted the affair and carried it out with only the expense of buying a boat.

He had not called upon Justin Laws for money, and more, he had remained sober.

But when the sloop and her crew were away Nick Norcross could not resist the temptation of a drink, and that meant a spree.

Then the idea entered his brilliant brain to blackmail Ezra Vail for five hundred dollars on his own account, and it led him, as has been seen, to his death.

Ezra Vail was not the man to blackmail.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE FUGITIVES.

"WELL, Nick, you have done it without a hitch, and placed me under another deep obligation," said Will Wilder, as he took the helm of the sloop after she was headed down Salem Harbor on her way out to sea.

"I did the best I could, Mate Will," replied Nick Norcross, proud of his achievement, as he had reason to be.

The sloop had on all the canvas she could carry, and, a fleet sailer, though old, she was making very fast time, as indeed she had reason to, for all on board knew that the schooner and cutter would doubtless be in their wake in a very short while.

"There is no fear of our not escaping, Nick, for we can run her ashore and take to the hills, thus getting away; but I don't wish to lose the schooner and her cargo, which you know was put back on her, expecting she would be sent with us as a prize up to Portsmouth."

"No, I guess you'll have time to dodge the pursuers: but I must leave you now."

"What! you won't go on with me, Nick?"

"Well, no, for I left things upset in Salem, and I'll just get you to row in and drop me ashore, so I can make my way back to the town before morning."

"All right, and then come to Boston and get your money, for I'll be there until my beard gets a few week's growth again so as to show I'm not the smuggler that was taken, you know."

"Yes, I'll be there; at the Good Cheer, I suppose?"

"Yes, that's where I put up, and I'll lie close, I can tell you."

"But, Will, what was all this about, I wonder."

"All what?"

"This pretending to have smuggled goods on board, and all that?"

"As near as I can get at it, for I was not told the reasons, it is to put a feather in the cap of that naval captain, who is in bad shape with the authorities, as he has done nothing of late."

"My capture was all right, and the lie I told upon the skipper of the schooner got him taken also; but he can prove his innocence of course, and yet it will reflect credit on Captain Spruel."

"That is what I got from hints let fall by my employer, and I only hope no harm will be done that gallant young Skipper Mountjoy."

"What if there is, so you escapes?"

"Ah, that is not what I wish for—but I must drop you here, Nick, if you must go."

"Yes," and the rescuer got ready to leave the boat as she ran close in ashore.

Luffing sharp the bold helmsman ran so near the shore, where there was deep water, that Nick Norcross was able to swing himself upon *terra firma*, while the craft glided on without losing headway, and once more went flying toward the sea, having hardly lost three minutes by the delay.

"Good-by, Nick," called out Wilder.

"Good-by, mate, and luck to you," was the reply, and Nick Norcross walked rapidly back toward the town, while the sloop swept on out of the harbor.

"Now, lads, we have got to run for a good hiding-place I know of, and I guess in twenty-four hours' time we can have this sloop in a way that her owner won't know her," said Will Wilder, and having gained the open sea, he covered the craft with canvas, wet the sails and kept her on at a pace that would have puzzled the Vidette to overhaul her in that quiet sea, had she been in close chase.

The inlet referred to was reached before dawn, and the sloop was run in close ashore and work begun upon her the moment it was daylight, for already had certain freight been removed from the hold, Mr. Wilder having wisely come prepared to carry out his well-planned scheme.

With block and tackle made fast to the mast and to the trunks of trees ashore, the sloop was hauled over on her beam-ends and at once paint-

ed on the exposed side with a dull, rusty-looking paint.

Her masts, which were terribly weather-stained, were scraped and oiled, and her long bowsprit replaced by a stump one.

Then her fairly good sails were unbent and an old lot of patched canvas bent on in their stead.

The other side was then painted, her cabin outside had the color changed from brown to blue, her topmast was housed and in many other ways she was completely metamorphosed.

The bearded crew were then told to shave themselves, and their hair was cut short, while Will Wilder took off his blonde wig and put on a false brown beard that completely changed his appearance.

Two of the men were paid off and discharged, with expense money back to Boston, and with what appeared to be a deck load of lumber, but which was really a dummy, made with planks taken from the hold, the sloop set sail after a delay of but fifteen hours, and headed for Boston.

Just after sunrise she was off Lowell Island, cruising along, and coming directly toward her from the southward was the Winged Arrow, evidently on her way into Salem Harbor and returning from her unsuccessful chase of the vessel now so near her.

In his disguise Will Wilder sat at the tiller, rather enjoying the danger of discovery, and as the schooner drew near she hailed:

"Sloop, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Where from?"

"Portland, sir, and Boston bound."

"Did you run the coast close on your way?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see anything of a large sloop, with lofty topmasts, weather-stained canvas, long bowsprit and hull painted black, upper work white?"

"Yes, sir, I saw her last evening off Cape Lights, far out and going for all she was worth," assured Will Wilder, speaking with the drawl of the far Down-East skipper.

"Which way was she headed?"

"Out to sea, sir; but I hope she hasn't done no harm."

"She is a smuggler and escaped night before last from Salem Harbor, and I came in chase, but sighted a sloop several leagues away that was strangely like her, so gave chase and upon overhauling her found I was mistaken."

"Much obliged, good-morning," and the two vessels once more were put on their respective courses, the gallant young officer commanding the Winged Arrow little dreaming that the fugitive craft was before his very eyes, while Will Wilder enjoyed greatly the success of his daring ruse.

"Well, lads, that was a close call!" he said with a light laugh, as the seemingly lubberly craft was once more on her course.

"It was, sir, and you are a bold man," said one of the seamen with admiration.

"Pluck wins nine times in ten, lads, as I have had reason to know."

"Now there goes the schooner that is looking for us, and not a man on board would believe his eyes if told this was the smuggler sloop."

"Well, we'll soon be in Boston, and then our work is done," and he added to himself:

"And then I believe I shall take a run to Salem to see my old friend Justin Laws."

CHAPTER XLIII.

A NEMESIS.

CAPTAIN EZRA VAIL gained a point in public favor at Salem, by having the man he had killed decently buried all at his own expense, and advertising for any relatives he might possess to notify them of his death.

"It was a close call for you, Vail," said Captain Spruel, as he sat with his friend in his rooms the second day of the tragedy.

"Yes, a very close call," was the reply.

"But, is it not time to hear from old Hunnewell?"

"He has been heard from."

"Ah! what does he say?"

"I did not hear from him."

"Who did?"

"The general."

"The Devil!"

"He knows old Nevitte was here, so communicated with him, and what he said the Lord only knows for I don't."

"This is strange."

"You'll think it more strange when I tell you Deering left for Portsmouth last night."

"Again do I say the Devil!"

"I have said it many times, but profanity does no good in this case."

"You are sure that he has gone?"

"Oh, yes."

"No mistake about it?"

"None, for I called on the general to-day, and he very coolly informed me that he had heard from Commandant Hunnewell and had dispatched his aide with return instructions."

"I ventured to ask if Captain Herbert Deering had gone, and he replied sharply:

"Major Deering was the bearer, sir."

"And what did you do?"

"Simply left the lion's den."

"What does it mean?"

"I do not know—only wish I did."

"Do you think there has anything leaked out?"

"How could it?"

"True, and the return of this Winged Arrow without catching the smuggler has been against you; but I save my goods and don't have to pay for the sloop."

"Yes, you are the gainer in this all through."

"As how?"

"You sought the ruin of Mountjoy and it will come."

"And I paid well for the work, for I canceled your debt, and this charter of the sloop and her crew, with their escape, was no small sum."

"You evidently got the worth of your money."

"Oh, yes, with Mountjoy in jail I will, for I will have gotten my revenge, and that is sweet to me."

"But you got the credit of capturing the prizes even if one escaped, and you made back your two thousand, so you should consider yourself well paid also."

"I am satisfied; but I don't like this taking the affair out of my hands, as the general has done."

"I think that is Deering's work, for I learn that Mountjoy not only saved his life, but also prevented the drowning of his aunt, Mrs. Kittredge, with her coachman and horses."

"This accounts for their interest in him."

"Certainly, and he will do all he can to prove Mountjoy innocent and a wronged man."

"How can he prove it?"

"Now that the sloop has escaped beyond all doubt, I cannot possibly see how he can do so."

"Then there is nothing to fear?"

"Not that I can see."

"You can trust your man Laws, who arranged the work for you?"

"I can up to a certain point."

"When that is reached I cannot."

"And when is that?"

"He is ambitious and a rascal."

"He is aware that the Company of my firm is my little boy, and he would like to become a partner, I know."

"When he feels that he has me wholly in his power he will tell me, instead of paying for his past valuable services, to put it in the firm and make him a partner, if for ever so small an interest."

"If I refuse he will consider it his duty to hint to me that it will be greatly to my advantage to do as he asks, before he makes it a demand."

"And you'll have to obey?"

"No, you do not know me, Spruel, if you think any man can bully me."

"What can you do to prevent his coming out with the secret?"

"I will simply have him in my power also, and to a greater extent than I am in his, and so we'll call it square, you see."

"You are a schemer, Vail; but what will prevent his saying what he thinks about me?"

"He does not know you are in my plot, but thinks I am using you as an innocent tool to gain my ends."

"He is very kind to think so," was the sarcastic reply of the naval officer.

"He better think so, than to know the truth."

"You are right, Vail, and I feel better after this talk with you."

"But one word more."

"Certainly."

"This crew of the sloop—what about them?"

"I am not known in the matter, for Laws arranged that."

"There was one, in fact, who suspected it, but fortunately for me he met a sudden death, so I have nothing to fear from them."

"I am glad of that, and I feel now at ease, so can face the trial of Mountjoy with a fearless front."

"When will it be?"

"The general said as soon as Major Deering returned, and he heard from old Hunnewell."

"That will be in a day or two, and the sooner the better."

"Yes, for the suspense will be over; but the prize will be yours, of course."

"You mean the schooner?"

"Yes."

"She will be sold for prize-money, to go to myself, officers, and crew."

"What do you consider her worth?"

"Five thousand dollars, for she is a splendid craft."

"That was my figure on her, and so consider her sold to me for that."

"Certainly, if you wish it, but she is not large enough for a voyager, and as a whaler would be useless."

"I know that; but she will make an excellent pleasure craft for my own use."

"Ah, yes, the very thing you need, if you want her for a yacht, and you are rich enough to afford such a toy."

"Yes, I am a rich man, Spruel, but not so rich as I wish to be by a great deal."

"I have vowed my son shall be the wealthiest man in the three Americas, by the time he is the head of the firm of Vail & Company. I always keep my vows," and the last words were uttered in a tone that showed Ezra Vail meant just what he said.

Then he added after a pause, while he seemed in deep thought:

"Had I possessed the wealth I have now I could have married the one woman I ever loved, for I could have bought her from her father, if she would not marry me for love.

"Mountjoy won her heart, and as she did not wed him, she would have taken any one who would give gold for her, or save her father from financial ruin.

"She did marry a rich old miser, but I am fast equaling his fortune, and some day he may die—who knows?

"I married a good woman, with money, of course, and her death a short while ago left me free, and my little son is my idol.

"Mountjoy is married, and some day I may yet wed the woman I love, and then I shall be as near happy as it is my nature to be.

"Now, Spruel, you know me as I am, and why I hate Mountjoy, for I believe he was the reason of the present wife of that old miser not loving me.

"Revenge is at the bottom of all my life, you see. I am a Nemesis," and Ezra Vail laughed harshly, a laugh it was that made Fred Spruel shudder, so much of wickedness was there in it.

CHAPTER XLIV.

GRACE HUNNEWELL.

WHEN Port-Captain Hunnewell received the dispatches of Fred Spruel, by special messenger, he read them most attentively.

"After all, Grace, Spruel was right about that young fellow Mountjoy, for he has caught him at last taking smuggled goods from a confederate at sea," said the commandant to his beautiful daughter, who was in his library with him when the dispatches arrived.

Grace Hunnewell seemed pained, to learn of Mountjoy's guilt, and said so, for she could not understand why any one should do a mean act to gain a living.

The next day the dispatches of General Navitte arrived, and the commandant looked puzzled.

Grace came in soon after, and her father said:

"My child, General Navitte ran down to see his niece at Salem, and took with him a promotion for his great-nephew, young Deering, for he has made him an aide on his staff with the rank of major."

"He is to be congratulated, sir, and from all I have heard of him he is most deserving of the honor.

"I have never met him, however."

"I have, and he is as handsome as a picture and brave as a lion.

"He is a splendid soldier as well, has a good fortune left him by his parents and is the heir of his aunt and great-uncle, while he is the youngest officer of his rank, as it now is, in the army.

"A good fellow to set your cap for, Grace."

"Good looks and gold would not influence me, father, but true manhood and a soldier's will," was the reply of the lovely girl.

"Well, here is what the general says:

"I send you the particulars as I get them, of this captain, but I have reason to believe that though Captain Spruel did his duty, the young coaster is not guilty in spite of all the appearances against him."

"Now, Grace, I don't half like this, for poor Spruel seems to be making too many blunders."

"So it seems, father; but he is of age and is considered a fine officer."

"Oh, yes; but the general goes on to say that he does not wish to interfere in the naval affairs which come under my jurisdiction, but desires that I will at once order a court to sit on the case of this Mountjoy, so, if innocent he may be cleared without delay."

"That is but just, sir."

"Yes, and I shall do it, and write the general at once that he, being on the spot, will please put the affair in the hands of his aide, Major Deering, who you know is friendly to Mountjoy, and so I need not send any communication to Captain Spruel."

This the commandant did, and it was his being ignored by his chief, and the fact of carrying a guilty conscience in his heart that had so worried Fred Spruel until reassured by his talk with Ezra Vail which is known to the reader.

A couple of days after, Grace had an engagement for a horseback ride with a young officer of the navy, who was stationed at Kittery, but when all ready, received a note from him stating that it was duty before pleasure and his vessel had just been ordered to get ready for sea.

Grace liked the young officer, and her father had a hope that it would be a match some day, for Lieutenant Dunwood Preble was well-born, rich, and a splendid fellow withal, and when she received the note she pouted prettily and voted the service really unkind to order an officer away, to her disappointment.

She, however, decided to go and get a lady

friend to accompany her, but finding her away from home, set off alone on her ride.

She took a road leading out of town toward the sea-shore.

It was a lonely road, and she had never gone that way alone before.

But she rode on until she came in view of the sea, and halted near a clump of trees to gaze upon the rugged but picturesque scene.

A shallop lay at anchor not far away, and filled in the picture, and a boat was half drawn out upon the beach beyond the woods and near a group of rocks.

Noticing some pretty wild flowers growing in a sheltered nook of the rocks she dismounted and began gathering them, when suddenly she started up with a half-cry of alarm as she beheld two men within a few steps of her.

They were rough-looking fellows and had evidently been the ones who had come ashore in the boat drawn up upon the beach not far away.

That they belonged to the shallop, she had no doubt, and in alarm she started toward her horse, though preserving her presence of mind the while.

She knew that there were wreckers on the Isles of Shoals, and a lawless set of men they were, suspected of far worse than wrecking.

Then Little Harbor, in which lay the shallop, she had heard was often sought by law-breakers, who were wont to seek hiding-places there for their plunder.

She regretted having come so far, and alone; but, determined to make the best of it, and had reached her horse when one of the men sprung forward and grasped the rein, while he said:

"Hain't you Miss Hunnewell, lady?"

"I am, sir."

He turned at her reply, and said something in a low tone to his companion, but which Grace did not catch.

But the other remarked:

"All right, if you says so."

"Waal, miss, I has a bitter grudge ag'in' your pa, for I served under him once, when he commanded the sloop-o'-war War Eagle, and he had the cat-o'-nine-tails put on my back on more than one occasion."

"If he did, you deserved it, for my father is a just man and a humane officer," was the spirited reply.

"Well, maybe I did, maybe I didn't; but I hain't forgive him for it, and I don't want no better chance to git even than to hold you until he pays every dollar he is worth ter git yer back ag'in' to his bleedin' bosom."

"How dare you speak to me so, sir?"

"Let go of my rein, I command you!"

"I hain't ter be commanded, miss, 'cause I commands."

"Yonder shallop is mine, and I has a crew of half a dozen good fellows, and I don't mind telling you we is wreckers, smugglers, or anything else we wants ter be that pays."

"You is my prize, miss, and in this wild place shrieking won't do no good."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE DISPATCH-BEARER.

GRACE was white with fear at the words of the wrecker, but she still retained her presence of mind, and her eyes flashed fire.

"Let me tell you, sir," she said, calmly, "if you know my father you are aware that he is not a man to trifle with."

"I am his only child, and if you tear me from him you will find the yard-arm your punishment as sure as you stand there before me."

"He is a poor man, having little else than his pay, but though he may give up all to get me back, he will never rest until he has avenged the insult you put upon his daughter."

"Words don't skeer me, miss, and it's catchin' afore hanging, so your threats don't have any effect."

"I has done enough now ter be hanged, but I hain't been captured all the same."

"What brought you here alone, I don't know; but here you is, and you goes on board my craft."

"The cabin's yourn, and nobody will disturb yer; but you remain in my charge until I bleed the old man's heart with sorrow for you, and his pocket of the last drop o' gold he can raise to git yer back ag'in, and ef he hain't got the sum I sets on yer, then you is ter be ther adopted daughter o' ther Wreckers' League."

"Come, now, don't make us be rough with yer, but go yer does!"

Quick as a flash Grace bounded away and sped along like a deer.

If she could only outrun the two villains, she was safe, she knew.

With her skirt thrown over her arm, she sped along with wondrous speed.

But the wreckers were not to be cheated out of their prey, and one of them leaped upon her horse and pursued.

She saw him, and doubling on her course, ran to the rocks along the shore, where a horse could not follow her.

But by the time she reached them, she had had a long run, and her pursuer was but a hundred feet away, and his companion, who, by her change of direction to the rocks, had cut across and drawn near.

Panting with her long run, she was no match now in speed for the man who had mounted her horse, and in a moment more she stopped and turned at bay, as she heard his steps close behind her.

And there was the other man also rapidly drawing near.

"Stand back, sir!" she almost shrieked in her terror.

The man laughed and sprung toward her, to fall dead at her feet ere the report of a pistol died away, and over the rocky shore appeared a form in uniform, and with a mighty bound he threw himself upon the other wrecker who had turned to fly.

There was a short, terrible struggle, and the wrecker went down at the feet of the victor.

"Catch your horse and fly, miss, for those fellows mean trouble," cried the stranger, and he pointed to a boat coming ashore from the shallop, and in which were four men.

"And you, sir, come with me, for you can mount behind me," said Grace.

"No; I have a comrade in my boat, and we can beat them back."

"Go at once, I beg of you."

Grace stood undecided and seeing it the brave rescuer sprung to the edge of the rocks and called down to some one in the boat, which the maiden could not see:

"Boatswain, blow your call for the cutter to come up!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came the ready answer, and a long, shrill, startling whistle arose on the air.

The order was heard by those in the boat, and beeded too, for the man in the stern shouted:

"Back water, men; he has help near!"

"Quick! pull for your lives, or we hang for it!"

The boat was quickly put around and the oarsmen pulled with all their strength for the shallop, while the one in the stern sheets hailed loudly:

"Ho, Meigs, the cap'n and Dick is done for, and there's a cutter load o' war's-men a-comin' onto us."

"Up with ther anchor, or we hangs!"

A man on the shallop was seen to spring to work at this startling command, and by the time the boat reached the craft the jib was set and the anchor had left the bottom.

Springing on board two men sprung to set all sail while the others hauled the boat up to the stern davits, and not until the shallop was a mile away, heading out of Little Harbor toward the open sea did those on board discover that they were not pursued.

A laugh from her rescuer bent the gaze of Grace Hunnewell upon him.

She saw a man whose face was one to at once attract attention.

Handsome, fearless, resolute and with eyes that could fairly sparkle with fun, or blaze with anger.

His splendid form was in the uniform of a major of the army at that time, and as he stood, a pistol in one hand and his sword in the other, Grace felt that she had never seen a more striking sample of splendid manhood.

His laugh, when he saw that the wreckers had fled, was full of merriment, and catching her look he bowed and said:

"Let me explain, madam, that there is no cutter and crew nearer than Portsmouth that I am aware of, and my companion in the boat is a fisherman who readily carried out my little plot to frighten those fellows and make them run, when I saw that you were determined to stand your ground."

"I am an officer's daughter, sir, and would not seek safety in flight and leave a brave rescuer to suffer for me."

"Well said, madam, but then you were at their mercy, I was not."

"I owe to you, sir, my escape."

"Permit me to introduce myself as Miss Hunnewell, the daughter of Port-Captain Hunnewell, commanding at Portsmouth."

"Indeed! I am bearing dispatches to your father, Miss Hunnewell, and my horse failing me on the road, I took a fisherman and his skiff at Sagamore Creek to go the rest of the way by water."

"I saw your chase, ran in and fortunately headed off your pursuers."

"Will you permit me to aid you to mount, for your horse awaits you, I see."

"Yes, he would not desert me, good fellow; but you, sir, will you continue on in your skiff?"

"It is some distance by land to Portsmouth, I judge?"

"Yes, quite a long ride, sir."

"And you are alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Night is not far away, Miss Hunnewell, the wind is fair up to the town, so let me suggest that you accept a seat in my skiff and allow my man to ride your horse."

"I thank you, Major Deering, and I really wished to ask it, for I fear the fright I got unnerved me, now the danger is over."

"But those unfortunate men, sir?" and she shuddered as she glanced toward the two wreckers.

Herbert Deering stepped toward them and placed his hand on the pulse of each.

"I think I have cheated the gallows of just prey, for they are dead; but I see the shallop has come to, so their comrades will return for them, and we must lose no time."

He hastened with her to the skiff as he spoke, told the man who had so promptly aided him in regard to the mythical cutter, to ride the horse up to town, and then spreading sail set out for the run, just as he saw that the shallop was coming back.

"We need have no dread of them, Miss Hunnewell, for this skiff sails like a witch, and they dare not follow us far on account of their own safety," and as though to verify his words the shallop soon gave up the chase and stood toward the shore where the two men had left their boat, and landed to discover the fate of their shipmates.

CHAPTER XLVI.

WELL MET.

REMEMBER, good reader, I am writing of a time when stage coaches and sailing vessels were the only means of transportation from place to place.

There were no railroads, no steamers or telegraph, and the mail facilities were most crude indeed.

Then too our government was comparatively in its infancy, and at ports and in ships-of-war there was a "one man power" that was the head of all departments.

To-day all is changed, and those of this age must remember what it was in those times to be a soldier and a sailor, and with the leaders the power was very great over the lives of those under him.

The general in command of the coast line, and hence the seaports along it, from Montauk to the Penobscot River, had also control of the cruisers on duty there, and, anxious to do full justice to Mountjoy, as also to oblige Miss Kittredge and his nephew who were so interested in the prisoner, General Nevitte had dispatched Herbert Deering to Portsmouth to explain to Captain Hunnewell the exact situation, and also get from him the career of the young sailor while he was in the navy.

Herbert Deering had undertaken the long journey with pleasure, to aid his friend, and he had pressed his good horse so hard that he had tired him out while yet some distance from his destination.

But he had found good stabling for him, and obtaining a good sea skiff and a fisherman, pressed on by water from Sagamore Creek, with the result already known.

His timely arrival had not only served Grace Hunnewell, but had placed her father under obligations which Herbert Deering just then rejoiced in, as he wished to use it in behalf of Mark Mountjoy.

But, after the skiff was well under way, the shallop had put back, and there was no cause of alarm, Herbert Deering turned his attention more particularly to his fair companion.

He had often heard of the beauty of Grace Hunnewell, and half a dozen officers of his regiment were in love with her, and they, with scores of others would have given much to have rendered her the service he had.

He saw a very beautiful girl indeed, and a riding-habit setting off a perfect figure.

Her eyes were full of expression, and purity and nobility of nature dwelt in their dark-blue depths.

Her face was still pale, and tears were in her eyes as he gazed at her, while her nether lip quivered slightly, showing that the shock had been a great one to her.

As though expressing her thoughts she turned suddenly her splendid eyes upon him and said, impetuously:

"Ah, Major Deering, what have I not to thank you for?"

"How can I ever repay you, or show my deep gratitude?"

Major Herbert Deering, who would not change color in a forlorn hope, was taken aback, and his face flushed crimson.

He had been caught indulging in deepest admiration of the lovely girl.

He started to reply and found himself stuttering.

Then he laughed in his light-hearted way and said:

"I was thinking, Miss Hunnewell, and you fairly startled me."

"What were you thinking of, if the question is a fair one?"

Here was a poser; but he met it bravely.

"I was thinking of you."

"Of me, how strange."

But the soldier did not think it so strange, and said:

"I was thinking that instead of being grateful to me, Miss Hunnewell, I am deeply indebted to you for placing yourself in a position that enabled me to serve you."

It was her time to blush now, and she said, quickly:

"I am full of gratitude to you, put it as you may; but I see you are a sailor as well as a soldier, for you handle your boat with great skill."

"I have been much on the water, so have

learned, and in fact came very near entering the navy instead of the army, but chose the military on account of my mother who did not wish me to live apart from her."

"Alas! she little dreamed how soon she would part from me forever, and my father quickly followed her; but see, here I am running on in an egotistical strain, as though there was no other theme, to discuss than myself."

"I am interested, so why change the subject?"

"I have discussed it, for I have told you all I believe, about myself."

"If report says true, I think not, for it is said that Major Deering is a most gallant soldier, and deserves the high rank he has won, while he is famous as a—"

"What, may I ask?" he put it in as Grace hesitated.

"Heart-breaker."

"Miss Hunnewell, permit me to say that I detest a man who would trifle with a woman's love, as much as I admire a coquette who can manage men, if she does not become wicked in her coquetry."

"I admire your candor, sir, and would judge that you spoke from experience," said Grace, with a mischievous smile.

"No, I have never loved any woman, Miss Hunnewell."

"I am heart whole and fancy free."

She saw that his words were not intended as a banter to her, and as she felt that they were advancing upon dangerous ground, she asked:

"May I inquire if you come in regard to that young sailor, Mountjoy?"

"I do, and I come to plead for a man whom I would stake my honor is falsely accused," and warming with his subject, he told to Grace Hunnewell the history of Mad Mark Mountjoy as he knew it.

She listened with the deepest interest, and when they reached the town, took his arm as an escort to her home, for night had already come on.

At last they arrived at the home of the old commandant, and as Grace put her foot upon the step, she turned and said impressively:

"Major Deering, we must save your friend, Mountjoy, at all hazards!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE VERDICT.

MAJOR HERBERT DEERING returned to Salem in a very pleasant humor, for he had every hope of Mountjoy's acquittal of the charges against him.

He had passed a day and night in Portsmouth and had been overwhelmed with kindness and gratitude from the old commandant, who looked upon the rescue of his only child as a very daring affair, and one that won his heart for the young soldier.

A couple of small vessels were at once dispatched in search of the shallop, Herbert Deering giving the two officers in command of them an exact description of the craft and the scene where it occurred.

But they returned after a couple of days' cruise without having seen the shallop, and stated that the wreckers had removed their dead comrades.

To the commandant, Major Deering had told Mountjoy's story, and gotten a letter from him to the court at Salem to be careful and not condemn an innocent man.

Then the gallant major started on his return, going back in the skiff to where he had left his horse, and which he found wholly rested and ready for the road.

All the way back to Salem the beautiful eyes of Grace Hunnewell would rise before the soldier until at last he said emphatically:

"By the gods of war; but I am in love."

"It's no use, I've got the fever."

"But Grace?"

"Ah! that I shall have to find out, for I have accepted the commandant's invitation to visit him in a month or so."

"If she loves me I will be a happy man; if not I shall be wretched."

"Ah, me! I am terribly afraid she is already pledged to another."

Arriving at Salem, the major made known the result of his mission, and showed that Mark Mountjoy's career had been a checkered one, and more, he had led a wild life.

Nothing against his honor stood on record to face him, though he had twice been appointed an officer in the navy and both times dismissed for his wild habits.

Then there stood to his credit the surrender of a private vessel to Captain Roland Monte in the port of New Orleans, and this alone would have gained him an officer's berth for the third time could he have been found by the Navy Department.

So the trial was set to begin at once, and the next day Mark Mountjoy was brought before those who were to try him for outlawry.

He and his crew faced their accusers manfully, and his first and second mates, Manning and Roslin, were determined to sink or swim with their captain, as were also his crew.

From the very first it appeared evident that some strong influence was at work to convict the prisoners.

What it was no one knew, but it was felt all the time.

Other smugglers and outlaws had been tried there, but never had their case created one atom the interest of the "Mountjoy Smuggler Trial," as it was called.

Alma was there, and by her side Miss Kittredge, now her devoted friend.

The general was there also, watching with hawk eyes every turn in the trial, and Herbert Deering sat by Mountjoy's defender, prompting and suggesting where he could.

Ezra Vail was also present, and his little son Rupert was with him, while of course the officer who brought the charges had a prominent seat, and he seemed to feel uncomfortable under it.

After the career of Mark Mountjoy had been picked to pieces, the last three voyages he had made were settled upon as those to condemn him on.

He had refused to come to when fired upon by the Vidette, and had led the cruiser a merry chase to Portsmouth in spite of a hot fire poured upon him, and when searched there, though nothing was found on board to condemn him, all the law officers felt assured that he had smuggled goods hidden away on his craft.

Then his cruiser with the soldiers on board was lightly touched on, as it placed captain Spruel in a bad light for his blunder, and the last trip of the Winged Arrow was the settling point, for the schooner had been seen signaling to the smuggler sloop, and afterward going alongside of her.

Thus the cruiser had found them, and on capturing the smuggler her skipper had confessed that he had just transferred his cargo to the Winged Arrow.

Upon boarding the latter vessel the goods had been found there, but Mark Mountjoy had said that the sloop was in distress, was sinking, and to save the cargo he had taken the things on board.

But an examination of the sloop showed that she was not sinking, and she had gone on into Salem Harbor with the cruiser and the Winged Arrow.

With these proofs against the accused, the prosecution rested the case.

It was necessary, the prosecutor said, to put down outlawry upon the high seas, and so bold had the evil-doers become that they had even cut the smugglers' sloop out from under the guns of the cruiser.

He asked thereupon the conviction of the prisoners, and the severest sentence that could be allowed, for smuggling was but the forerunner of piracy.

Mark Mountjoy, calm, dignified and fearless, told his story as it was.

But no one believed it, at least the largest part by far of those present put it down as simply a defense.

Then came the verdict, and poor Alma uttered a cry of distress as in a distinct voice the word was spoken:

"Guilty, and recommended to the severest penalty of the law!"

"They went by the evidence, yet I cannot believe him guilty, my child," said General Nevitte to Alma.

"They went by the evidence, yes. But there is something to fathom behind all this," sternly responded Herbert Deering, and somehow his words gave hope to the heart of the poor wife that the tide might yet turn in her husband's favor.

But meanwhile Mark Mountjoy and his unfortunate crew were sent to prison.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

UNDER FALSE COLORS.

A MAN sat in a room at the Good Cheer Inn, in the town of Boston.

On a table at his elbow was a decanter and glass, a pipestem was between his teeth and he was engaged in reading the morning paper which the good old-time town then boasted of.

Papers were then far from what they are to-day, but yet the reader seemed to find much to interest him in the several copies he had been reading over.

Suddenly from his lips broke a savage oath, and he brought his clinched fist down upon the table with a force that made the decanter and glass bounce and ring.

"It shall not be! no, by Heaven! it shall not be!"

He uttered the words in deep, suppressed tones, and rising, paced to and fro excitedly.

"And that is the man they have condemned, is it?"

"If I had but known his name, and who he was on that night, it should not have been, and I swear he shall not suffer now."

"No, I go at once to do justice, to prove that I am no craven."

"His face seemed so familiar that night, and yet I could not place him then."

"I do now, and I shall act."

He stepped to the bell-rope and gave a ring that brought a servant flying to his room.

"Mick, when does the stage leave for Salem town?"

"To-morrow morning, sur, at dawn, it's after paving; but was yer Honor sick, sur?"

"No, why?"

"You looks it, sur, for yer face is after bein' pale, and yez jist jerked that bell cl'ane off the wall."

The man laughed, and said:

"I must go to Salem, so see if there is anything to sail to-day for that port."

"Yis, sur."

"And then see if there is some vehicle going that way, if no craft leaves."

"I'll do it, sur, this blessid minute."

"You will never do it if you stand there—here, this may grease your shoe soles," and he tossed him a piece of silver which sent Mick off like a rocket.

In half an hour he was back again.

"A sloop is after sailin' at noon, sur."

The man glanced at a handsome gold watch he wore and said:

"That gives me two hours and a half."

"Yis, sur."

Then he stepped to a window which gave him a grand view of the bay and said to himself:

"The wind is from the southward and blowing a ten-knot breeze, so the run will be rapid."

"Mick, what kind of a craft is it?"

"A trim coaster, sir—The Nadle they calls her."

"The Needle! I'll take her, for I know her."

"Now go to Belshazzar the Jew and tell him to come here at once."

"Yis, sur."

"Tell him the sooner he comes the more money it is in his pocket."

"I'll do it, sur."

"And the sooner you get back the quicker you'll earn the fellow to that silver piece I gave you."

"I'm gone."

And in spite of half a dozen bells ringing in the office for his services, Mick went sailing through on his errand.

In ten minutes he was back again, and soon followed Belshazzar the Jew.

"Ah, gintlemans, you vas sent for me, I pe-lieves?" said that worthy as he entered, and he rubbed his hands over each other with the air of one who felt there was business to be done.

"Well, I am changed, old Israel, if you don't know me, after all the money you have cheated me out of."

"Solomon's Temple! it vas t'e capt'ins."

"Yes, but curb your surprise and talk business."

"I wish a perfect disguise."

"You vas so disguise now dot—"

"I am known in my present appearance to those among whom I am going."

"Talk quick and say what it shall be."

"An officer's uniform?"

"No, for I shall have to explain."

"A woman's dress—"

"Bah! a woman six feet high."

"Vell, vas you a Catholics?"

"No."

"How vas a priest's robes?"

"The very thing, but will it be sufficient?"

"Shave yourselves clean, mine fri'nt, and maype I gif you von vig of white hair."

"That's it, and a priest's frock and hat."

"Don't forget the crucifix and beads, and fortunately I was an altar-boy when I was a youngster, so know the service by heart."

"I'll pray for you, old Israel, in the best of Latin if you'll fix me up just right."

"I vas not needing any prayers, mine fri'nt, tho' I t'anks you kindly."

"No, you are beyond the power of prayer, Belshazzar; but hurry away and bring me the things here within the quickest time possible, for I am to sail at noon."

"You vas going away?"

"Yes; and I wish you would do the same."

"I vas gone, and—"

"Hold! as you go through the office, hail Mick and tell him to run up to this port under full sail, for I want him."

"Yes, mine fri'nt," and the Jew had hardly disappeared before Mick put in an appearance.

"Mick, go down to that sloop, the Needle, and engage me passage on board to Salem."

"Here is the money, and then, half an hour before her time of leaving, come here for me and open the side-door down-stairs so I can leave without attracting attention."

"Yis, yer Honor."

Within an hour the Jew was back again, and he found his customer cleanly shaven and ready for his priestly robe.

"Here vas t'e very t'ings, mine fri'nt; but it was expensive."

"Plague the expense just now, old Israel, and rig me out if you want my prayers."

The Jew quickly obeyed, and when the wig of snowy hair was put on and the frock concealed his form, the disguised man looked indeed like a priest, for he put on an expression to accord with his cloth.

"What's my name, Israel?"

"Mine gootness! vas you forgot your names, capt'in?"

"I mean my new name, for you ought to furnish me one."

"Names vas expensive, mine fri'nt."

"Yes, when you sign one that is not your own; but how will Father Wildermere do?"

"Dot vas so pretty."

"I am glad you like it; but let me pay you, for Mick will be up in a few minutes for my hand-bag, and I don't wish him to find a priest of his church in such close contact with the—devil!"

The Jew laughed, but it was because he added ten per cent. to the bill for being called the devil.

Then he departed, and a few minutes after Mick entered the room to start back and cry out:

"Howly Moses!"

"No, Mick, old Moses has just left; but there is my carpet-bag, and if you don't get me on board the Needle in time, never a prayer do you get out of me for your guilty soul."

In a quarter of an hour more and Mick was bidding "His Riverince" farewell and wishing him a good voyage as he stood on the pretty sloop Needle, Salem bound.

CHAPTER XLIX.

FATHER WILDERMERE.

MR. JUSTIN LAWS came out of his boarding-house picking his teeth with the air of a man who had enjoyed his breakfast, and was in good humor with the world and himself in particular.

His hours were half an hour later now at the office, since he had been advanced, and he made it a rule never to arrive a minute too soon.

No, his services were too valuable for that, and he would not infringe upon his own time.

The trial of Mountjoy was over, and Captain Vail had run off to G— and to Boston, to have a look at his other homes.

He had gone away apparently satisfied with the manner in which things had gone, and yet he had said to himself:

"I wish they had hanged him."

"But should he escape it will come to that, for he'll take to piracy, or I am greatly mistaken."

Mr. Laws was left in full charge, and a very handsome present had been given him for his valuable services for his master, while he had been told to pay promptly all his pledges for the work done by Will Wilder.

Justin Laws at once made his fellow clerks feel his authority.

When before they had found him not a bad fellow, they now discovered him to be more severe than was Ezra Vail by far.

He spoke to them, as though he was conferring a favor, and found fault with the slightest trifle that went wrong.

He ensconced himself in the private office of Ezra Vail, and got a bell to ring when he needed any one to wait upon him.

He had been told by Captain Vail to purchase the Ivy Lodge, for it would surely be for sale, and also to buy the Winged Arrow, which was to be put up for the prize-money.

Leaving his boarding-house that evening, Mr. Laws had given his landlady notice that he should give up his room at the end of the week, as his duties were such he must be nearer the office, so he had secured rooms at the Salem Inn.

Landlady Betts was in tears over this sudden shock, for she hated to lose a boarder, especially Mr. Laws, whom she had set her cap to catch, and now saw slipping out of the net.

She was enjoying a real good cry in the parlor, when Margaret, the red-headed servant-girl, ushered into the room a Catholic priest.

Mrs. Betts uttered a startled cry, bowed low to the priest, with:

"Your blessing, father," while she gave Margaret a look in which there was a world of profanity and wrath to come, at catching her as she had.

"I hope you are not in sorrow, my good woman!" said the priest, in a sepulchral voice worthy of a burial.

"I have had bad news, father; but be seated, please, and it is me that you wish to see?"

"I always wish to see the good and the beautiful, my child"—Mrs. Betts became all smiles at this—"but just now I am here to see Mr. Justin Laws."

"The hateful old thing, he's just left here, and gave me notice he was to leave, and board at the inn, and I had just gotten new curtains for his room, and was embroidering him a pair of slippers."

"Ah! I hope he is not getting frivolous, that he goes among the worldly to lodge, away from this dove's nest of a home, and more, I hope that he has not been sinful enough to trifle with your young and tender affections, for I found you in tears, my dear child—in tears!"

Landlady Betts gave the priest credit for hitting the bull's-eye the first shot. But she said:

"I am a lone widow, father, but know how to protect myself."

"It is true that Mr. Laws has been very attentive, but no more, I may say," and Mrs. Betts blushed.

Then the father asked with an emphasis on the *my child* that tickled Mrs. Betts amazingly:

"Did you say Mr. Laws was not in, *my child*?"

"He has gone to the office, father, not a quarter of an hour ago."

"I shall seek him there then, but I hoped to find him at home."

"Perhaps it is as well that I did not," and the landlady failed to see the significance of the words, for the holy father had read at a glance that whatever had gone on in Justin Laws's room she would have been cognizant of.

"You are an old friend of Mr. Laws, father, for I have heard him speak of you so often," said Mrs. Betts, with no blush at the ready lie she was guilty of.

"Yes, we are very old friends, for we were boys together, and it was from his letters of you that led me to think you were betrothed to him; but he is bashful, and only needs persuasion to come out as his heart dictates; but he loves you, I am sure he does, for he has told me so," and with this the priest left the landlady half wild with delight, while he laid up for the unfortunate Justin a "scene" when he should again see the Widow Betts.

Going down into the town, as though familiar with the place, he made his way to the office of Ezra Vail & Company.

The clerks saluted him politely as he entered, and in return his sepulchral voice uttered the words:

"My blessings upon you all."

"I would see Mr. Justin Laws," he continued.

"He is in his private office, sir; please follow me," said a clerk, and disobeying his instructions to admit no one without first announcing him to the august confidential clerk and manager, he threw open the door and the priest stepped within the sacred precincts of Mr. Justin Laws's sanctum.

The visitor was "Father Wildermere."

CHAPTER L.

THE PRETENDED PRIEST PAYS A VISIT.

HAD a horse been turned loose in the sanctum of Justin Laws, he could not have been more startled than at beholding a priest.

He was a good Presbyterian, and seemed to fear that the visitor had some designs upon changing his creed, or attacking his purse, each to be dreaded, for though Justin Laws passed the hat in his own church, he never gave a red penny himself, though he always made it appear that he did to those who happened to have their eyes upon him.

At sight of his visitor he forgot his new-fledged dignity and rose quickly.

"Did you wish to see me, sir, or is it Captain Vail you called on? but he's away, sir, in Boston, left here but a few days ago, and when he will return, I really cannot tell you, so you see it would hardly be worth your while to wait."

"But if you—"

"My son, a prattling tongue showeth a rattle-brain, so calm your troubled soul and let me speak, for I have much to say to thee."

The clerk was startled at the sepulchral voice, and more so when the visitor threw himself into his own easy-chair with the air of one who intended to make himself at home just then.

"Well, sir, how can I serve you, for I am very busy this morning."

"You were reading a paper when I came in, so if you can find time for such worldly pleasures you can spare me a few hours."

"Hours! oh, Lord!"

"Profanity! oh! my son! my son!"

Poor Laws was nearly beside himself, for the visitor was in his easy-chair, had quietly taken up a cigar he had laid on the desk for himself, and placed it unlit between his lips.

"I beg pardon, sir, but I meant not to be profane, but—"

"My name is Father Wildermere, and we were boys together, Justin Laws."

"The deuce we were! I mean that—"

"Ha! ha! ha!" broke in Father Wildermere, with a hearty laugh.

Then, as he saw the look of abject misery on the face of Justin Laws, he said:

"Sit there, Justin, for I have something to say to you."

"Have you forgotten your old boyhood chum, Will Wilder?"

"Great Heavens! I know you now, but with that graveyard voice, that priestly garb and white hair, how could I recognize you, Will?" and Justin Laws seized his friend's hand and wrung it heartily.

"Why, if the devil had come for you, you could not have been more alarmed, Justin; but I am here on business."

"Doubtless, and I am ready for you."

"Good!"

"When did you get here?"

"Before dawn on a sloop from Boston."

"You are at the hotel?"

"Yes, and called on you at your boarding-house, but found you gone."

"But Justin?"

"Yes, Will."

"I found your landlady in tears."

"Hang her!"

"It was on your account, because you were going to leave, she told me; but I cheered her by telling her that you loved her, and—"

"Damnation! did you tell her this, William Wilder?"

"Don't swear before one of my cloth, Justin Laws, for it pains me to hear profanity."

"Nonsense! did you tell that old cat what you said?"

"Of course I did, for she began on me with a lie, telling me she had heard you speak of me so often, and I just gave her something to think of, and how tickled she was."

"I'll never dare go there again," said Laws, dismally.

"Bah! she loves you!"

"Am I blind? have I not seen it?"

"She's not so bad."

"Bad! she's the devil!"

"Well, I'm sorry I paved the way for a row."

"I'll go with you and—"

"No you don't, for I know you of old, William Wilder, and you would make it ten times worse."

Will Wilder laughed and then said:

"Well, to business, now."

"I am ready."

"I did your work well."

"Yes, without a flaw; but it was a nice fellow you sent to get you out of the scrape."

"Who?"

"Norcross."

"Ah! what do you know of him?"

"I was on the water and saw him go out to the sloop the night of the escape, and the next day he came into the office intoxicated, asked for Ezra Vail and raised a row, or would have done so had I not frightened him."

"Indeed! I didn't think Nick was a man to scare easily; but I am amazed at what you tell me, and I shall see that he gets no more work from me."

"I guess so, for he's dead."

"Dead!" and Will Wilder sprung to his feet.

Quietly slipping into the comfortable chair which he had just vacated, Justin Laws said:

"Yes, he came here at night to rob the safe; but Captain Vail had got some papers from his office which he needed, and coming here, found the man with lantern and tools breaking into the money-box."

"Your man fired upon the captain, but missed and was shot dead."

Will Wilder sunk into a chair, not noticing the change made by Justin Laws, and said impressively:

"Poor Nick, he was drinking, or he would never have done that."

"No, he was no burglar, not that, not that!"

Then he asked:

"Where is he buried?"

"In the cemetery, for Captain Vail gave him a good burial at his expense."

"A man who takes life can afford to look after the corpse," was the bitter reply of Wilder.

Then he said:

"Well, I cannot blame Vail; but let us see how we stand in money matters."

"I owe you just two thousand dollars, and—"

"The charter of the sloop, pay of the crew, provisioning her, and minor expenses were six hundred, and Nick was to get five hundred, while I advanced him one hundred—that will make twelve hundred and fifty."

"Will you want the money Norcross was to get?"

"Of course I will—why not?"

As Mr. Laws did not know why not, he was silent.

"That leaves me clear for myself about seven hundred, for I shall send Norcross's share, every dollar of it, to his poor old mother."

"I may be an outlaw, Justin, but I have honor, even if you call it the honor among thieves."

"I believe you, Will; but here is your money," and Justin Laws went to a money-drawer and counted out the cash.

Placing it in his pocket, Wilder said:

"Now, Justin, I have a secret to tell you, and prepare yourself for a surprise," and the pretended priest drew his chair close up to that of Justin Laws, who felt a shiver run through his heart at fear of coming evil, of he knew not what.

CHAPTER LI.

AN OUTLAW'S HONOR.

"WELL, Wilder, what is your secret?" asked Justin, anxiously, as though dreading the suspense of waiting.

The pretended priest put his money away and said, quietly:

"I would like to know just what your interest in this smuggling affair was?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"Were you working for your own interests, or another's?"

"Again I decline to speak."

"Well, what was the motive of it all?"

"I will not tell."

"Justin, I have made a grave error."

"How?"

"I have made a cruel mistake."

"In what way?"

"What was the result of this affair after our escape?"

"Satisfactory."

"To whom?"

"To the parties interested."

"Ah! then there was a trial, I believe?"

"Yes."

"And an innocent man and his crew, equally innocent, were sent to prison."

"They were proven guilty."

"Of what?"

"Breaking the laws."

"Doing what?"

"Smuggling."

"Nonsense!"

"I say they were."

"And they were sent to prison?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"Ten years for the skipper, and seven for his crew."

"They had a fair trial?"

"Perfectly so."

"Who were the witnesses against them?"

"Captain Spruel of the cutter, and his officers."

"Any one else?"

"There was no need of it."

"What did they testify?"

"To what does all this tend, Wilder?"

"I will tell you in good time."

"Why not now?"

"Answer my question."

"What is it?"

"What did the cutter's captain and his crew testify?"

"That they caught Mountjoy receiving smuggled, or piratical goods on board his vessel."

"What else?"

"Hang it, man, why did you not come to the trial?"

"I was a fugitive and could not be there; but, I wish to Heaven I had been."

"What for?"

"To tell the truth!"

Justin Laws sprung to his feet, and turned very pale.

"You do not mean that you would have betrayed my confidence, Will?" he said in a quivering voice.

"Oh, no; I betray the confidence of no man. I assured you I was honorable in my way."

"What would you have done then?"

"As I said, tell the truth."

"Will Wilder."

"Yes, Justin."

"This beating about the bush is not right between you and me."

"What do you wish?"

"To know what you would have told."

"I would have told them that Mountjoy was not guilty and—"

"And thus have spoiled all."

"Aha, that is what I was after, to know that the imprisonment of this man was the real cause of this whole plot."

"He was wanted out of the way, and your cunning accomplished it, Justin."

The confidential clerk bit his lips. He saw that he had been led to commit himself by the shrewd outlaw.

"Well, granted such was the case."

"I would never bend myself to wrong an innocent man, as you have wronged him, and others."

"You are getting very virtuous as you grow older, Wilder."

"No, I am just; that is all. But this must not be, Justin."

"What must not be?"

"That this man shall be imprisoned."

"He is in prison now."

"He must be let out."

Justin Laws was again on his feet, his face white with terror.

"What would you do?" he gasped.

"I'll tell you what I shall do. I'll confess the truth!"

The clerk fell back in his chair as though he had received a blow, and just then one of the office boys put his head in the door and began:

"Mr. Laws, there is—"

Then came a yell of terror from the boy and he fled, just dodging an ink stand that was hurled at him.

"My son, let not your angry passions rise," suggested the pretended priest in his sepulchral tones.

"See here, Will Wilder, we must understand each other."

"The sooner the better, my dear Justin."

"What did you mean by saying you meant to confess all?"

"I'll tell you in my own way."

"Pray do so."

"The man's name is Mountjoy, I believe?"

"Yes."

"He has a wife and children?"

"I believe so."

"You know so, and, let me tell you, I have seen his broken-hearted wife, for I went there before I called upon you."

"I pretended to be a friend of her husband's, and heard the whole story."

"Now let me say that I know the man also."

"You met him on his schooner."

"I met him before that, but did not recognize him then, and I'll tell you that I owe him a big debt."

"Then you should be glad he is out of the way."

"No for the debt I owe him is my life."

"What?"

"It was in Havana. He was a middy then. I had been captured by a lot of Spaniards who accused me of being a pirate. They would have garoted me, when that midy came along."

"He saw that I was an American, heard what was going on, and boldly sprung among the crowd with his drawn sword and released me, telling my captors that I was one of the seamen of his vessel, and he would kill the man that dared touch me again."

"They believed they had made a mistake, although I confess to you they were right, and Midshipman Mark Mountjoy marched me off with him."

"He took me on board ship, saying that I was to bear some packages alone for him, and at dark went with me on board a craft he had sent a seaman to get a berth on for me."

"My man, you may be a pirate," he said to me, "and the chances are two to one that you are, but those cut-throat Spaniards would garote an American, so I helped you out."

"Have you any money?"

"I was obliged to confess that I had not."

"Well, he gave me forty dollars and we parted, and I am the one that put him where he now is, in prison, and caused his beautiful wife to suffer so deeply."

"I tell you, Justin Laws, all the powers that Vail & Company and you can bring to bear, with Captain Spruel thrown in, shall not prevent me from releasing that noble man," and the sailor brought his hand down on the table with a force that fairly frightened Justin Laws.

"My God, Wilder, don't get excited, and I'll help you."

"We'll aid him to escape, you know."

"Not I, for escape leaves the stain of dishonor still upon him."

"He shall go free out of that prison, Justin Laws, with the charge of outlawry against him proven to have been false."

"I swear it upon an outlaw's honor, yes, I swear it by yonder Heaven above!" and the words and manner of the strange man fairly aroused the confidential clerk of Vail & Company into a fit of abject misery that was painful to behold.

CHAPTER LII.

OUT OF BONDAGE.

"GREAT God! Wilder, you will ruin me, yes, ruin all, by your reckless work," at last Justin Laws cried in terror.

"Oh, no, Justin, don't you fear, for I shall not betray you."

"How can you help it?"

"I shall be the sacrifice."

"You?"

"Yes."

"What would you do?"

"Go and deliver myself up and state that the story of the young skipper and his men was true."

"You are a bigger fool than I took you to be."

"Why?"

"They will throw you into prison."

"I know that."

"And you will sacrifice yourself to save Mountjoy?"

"I will."

"And rot in prison?"

"Oh, no."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll escape."

"It is not an easy thing to do."

"I know that, but I'd give myself up if I knew I could never escape, as an atonement for bringing misery on that noble man."

"You are a queer one."

"I know you cannot understand me, but you must help me."

"Put my head in the lion's mouth with yours?"

"No, and don't get satirical for it angers me, Justin."

"How can I help you?"

"To escape."

"I cannot."

"You must."

"I say I cannot."

"You plotted a game so cunning against Mountjoy that you must try your hand again to save me."

"I can do nothing."

"Listen to me."

"I am all attention."

"I shall go, as I said I should, and give myself up."

"I shall say that I escaped, but learning that Captain Mountjoy had been imprisoned with his crew, I came to surrender myself as the guilty one, and to state that neither he or any of his crew ever did one single act that was wrong."

"I shall tell that I signaled him, thinking it was a confederate of mine, and learning my mistake, determined to seize his beautiful schooner, which I recognized, and so played off that my sloop was leaking, and thus got my plunder on board."

"Then I wished to save the sloop also, and was going to hail him to send several of his men

on board, after I got there, so as to seize them or kill, when the coming of the cruiser captured me.

"Hoping to escape, by sending the cutter after the schooner, I told him that she was my ally, and my cargo on board proved it, as it were."

"But this will be a lie."

"My dear Justin, a man who can cut a throat and smuggle, should not be squeamish about lying, especially when it will save a life."

"This is my story, and it will set Mountjoy free, and then you must do as much for me."

"If you are such a fool as to give yourself up, I'll not help you out."

"Justin Laws, my story in nowise injures you, or compromises you, and I say you shall help me."

"Shall?"

"Yes, you shall pledge yourself to get me out of prison, and if you refuse, I pledge you I shall tell the whole story of how you, Ezra Vail, and Captain Spruel, for reasons best known to yourselves, conspired to wreck the life of Mark Mountjoy."

"I'll let it all out, so help me, God!"

"I'll save you—I'll get you out! Indeed, I will! I pledge my word, I will!" excitedly cried Justin Laws, and, with a smile, the outlaw said:

"So be it!"

"Now, have here to-night a package of clothing, for if I go in this garb, after visiting you here, it will compromise you."

"I am careful of your honor, you see, Justin."

"I want a sailor's suit, and I'll leave the hotel, as it were, as a priest, and coming here with you, can make the change, and go to the jail as a sailor, and give myself up. Do you understand?"

"Yes. But will nothing change you from your determination?"

"Nothing."

Justin Laws sighed, and feeling convinced that he would not fail him, Will Wilder took his leave.

Passing out through the office he again bestowed his blessing upon the clerks, and then sought his room at the hotel.

At night, after nine o'clock, he joined Justin Laws at the office door, and when he came out half an hour after he was dressed as a sailor and no longer wore his white wig.

"I deposited my money and valuables with Landlord Hastings, Justin, as Father Wildermere, telling him I was going on a cruise that would take some time."

"But let me tell you that I don't wish you to let that cruise I am going on last too long."

"I will do the best I can."

"Oh, I won't be unreasonable, but after a month has gone by if I am still inside prison walls, I'll begin to jog your memory of the past in a way that will make it unpleasant for you."

"But we won't quarrel old friend, just as I am going into a living tomb as it were."

"Good-by, Justin, and luck to you as long as you do not forget me."

He shook hands with Laws, and turning abruptly away went up into the town and soon appeared at the jail door.

After a talk with the keeper he passed within the walls of a prison, a sacrifice to his gratitude to Mark Mountjoy, for a favor rendered long years before.

The next morning while at breakfast the trio at The Harborage were broken in upon by Captain Spruel's appearance, who reported the startling fact that the smuggler chief had come and surrendered himself rather than allow innocent men to suffer, and his confession, written out, had been sent to the commander of the Vidette, who at once brought it to the general to act upon.

The general, Herbert Deering and Fred Spruel, went together to the jail and held a long talk with the smuggler chief, and were convinced that he told the truth, at least two of them were, for the commander of the cruiser well knew all the while, and congratulated himself that no one else seemed to be aware of the fact.

"Major Deering?"

"Yes, general."

"Write out an order releasing that wronged man and his crew, and go yourself to the State Prison and release them—then escort Mountjoy to his home, and in my name, for I will take the responsibility of doing so, invite the captain and his wife to dine at The Harborage with us to-morrow."

The young major saluted and went to obey the pleasantest command he had ever received, and soon after Mark Mountjoy and his crew were free men, out of bondage, and while his mates and men went on board the Winged Arrow and took possession, the wronged skipper was escorted to his home by Herbert Deering.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE DUEL.

It was the second day after his release from prison, that Mark Mountjoy and Herbert Deering held a long conversation together in the little arbor at Ivy Lodge.

The result of this interview was that the gal-

lant major made his way on board the cruiser Vidette and was invited into the captain's cabin when he sent his name.

"Be seated, Major Deering."

"Captain Vail you know?" said Spruel, for the merchant whaler was with him, having arrived in Salem that morning.

Major Deering bowed to the merchant and said:

"Captain Spruel, when friend Mountjoy was arrested under false charges, you remember that there was an affair of honor between him and yourself left unsettled."

"I now come to demand that you meet him, as before agreed, at Naugus Head, at sunrise to-morrow, if convenient, for by going there under cover of the night we will not attract the attention of the curious."

Fred Spruel bit his lips in a vexed way, and after a minute of meditation said:

"What do you say, Vail, for I suppose I must meet this fellow?"

"Sir!" and Herbert Deering was upon his feet in an instant, his eyes flashing fire.

"I retract the epithet, sir, for as he is your friend, I had no right to so speak of him."

"I have before intimated, that if Captain Spruel sought a meeting with me, as his actions have more than once indicated, I am wholly at his service when the duel on hand is over."

The officer bowed, and Captain Vail remarked:

"Let us agree upon it, Captain Spruel, as Major Deering desires?"

"Very well, I am content," and at his words Herbert Deering bowed coldly and left the cabin.

That night the Winged Arrow got under way and headed seaward, overtaking on the way the cutter from the Vidette with a small party on board.

By the time that Mark Mountjoy and Herbert Deering reached the ground selected for the meeting, the cutter arrived, and the day was just dawning.

In the cutter were four oarsmen and a coxswain, with Captain Spruel, Ezra Vail and the Vidette's surgeon in the stern sheets.

The sun was rising when both parties met on the field, and the blades, rapiers, were placed in the hands of the duelists.

Mark Mountjoy was as unconcerned as though a looker-on apparently; but in his eyes shone a revengeful light that boded evil to his enemy.

The naval officer was stern-faced and wore a wicked look that indicated his intentions toward the man he had wronged.

The blades crossed with a clang that made the sparks fly, and instantly the fight became determined and fierce.

Fred Spruel was indeed a master swordsman, but in less than a minute he was disarmed, and all held their breath as the point of Mountjoy's rapier seemed about to pierce his breast.

But it was quickly lowered and Mark Mountjoy turned on his heel with a quiet smile.

Instead of appreciating the favor of his life, Fred Spruel was enraged, and said in a husky voice:

"Vail, I demand a meeting now with pistols."

"If Captain Mountjoy is willing to grant it, Captain Spruel, for it rests with him, you know," Ezra Vail announced, and his respect for the skipper had wonderfully increased since he had seen him handle a sword.

Ezra Vail turned to Major Deering, who questioned his principal upon the subject, though he said that he thought the naval officer had no right to ask it.

"If Captain Spruel desires a memento to keep in his mind, yes," was the response, and the pistols were taken from their cases, loaded and the duelists placed in position.

Herbert Deering lost the word, and Ezra Vail showed that he meant to be tricky, so as to aid his principal.

He gave the first words slowly, but the last quickly.

But he was not so quick but that Mark Mountjoy was quicker, and his bullet struck the pistol arm of his foe, causing it to drop to his side and let his own weapon fall, still loaded to the ground.

Without a glance at his adversary, Mountjoy turned away, but then said something to Major Deering in a low tone, who said:

"Captain Mountjoy desires to offer his vessel to carry Captain Spruel back to the town."

"No!" sternly said Fred Spruel, setting his teeth as the surgeon probed the wound to see if the bone was broken.

Both men bowed and passed on, and the Winged Arrow headed on her way to Portsmouth, whither Major Deering was going with important dispatches from the general, and glad of a chance to once more see Grace Hunnewell.

"By the gods of war, Mark, what a swordsman you are, and you send a bullet just where you aim," said the major, as they stood on the deck of the Winged Arrow, watching the cruiser's cutter rowing rapidly back to the town with her wounded captain.

"I did not care to kill him, though I at first intended to do so."

"He will have cause to remember me now," was the quiet reply.

"Yes; he will hardly call you out again."

"I could have prevented it by breaking his arm and causing the loss of it; but I fired to give a flesh wound only, and I feel that your uncle the general will be glad that I did not kill him."

"I know that he will, as also my aunt; but have you any intention of leaving Salem after all you have suffered there, Mark?"

"No; I shall remain and live down the persecutions of my foes," was the stern response of the young sailor.

But little he dreamed what the future had in store for him.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE FATAL SHOT.

THE news of the duel soon spread over the town, and created more excitement, especially when the particulars leaked out that Mark Mountjoy had challenged the naval officer for his false charges against him, and then after disarming him, had given him his life.

Such a thing was considered impossible, for Captain Spruel was noted as a skillful swordsman.

Then came the second meeting, and Mark Mountjoy at least gained the admiration of General Nevitte and Miss Kittredge for his merciful act, for he had suffered enough to have been merciless they both knew.

The cruise to Portsmouth was made, and Herbert Deering determined to return on the Winged Arrow, instead of by stage-coach as he had intended.

He had been made happy by discovering that Grace Hunnewell was not engaged, and as Captain Hunnewell was anxious to consult with the general and had so written, he had been invited by Miss Kittredge to bring his daughter and visit The Harborage.

This they had consented to do, when urged by Herbert, and as the Winged Arrow had a most comfortable and commodious cabin, they had taken passage back on her, greatly to the delight of Major Deering.

Upon the arrival of the Winged Arrow, flying the flag of the port captain of the station, the Vidette ran up her colors, beat to quarters and fired a salute, which Mark returned promptly by dipping the American ensign.

The captain and Grace were warmly welcomed to The Harborage, and Mark left Mate Manning in charge of his schooner and started homeward, amid a gaping crowd.

On his way he met Captain Ezra Vail and Justin Laws, who bowed to him.

He coldly returned the bow, and as he passed Ezra Vail said:

"Laws, that man must be gotten rid of."

"He is still in the way, sir?"

"Of course, for did he not wound poor Spruel, and to call him out would be sure death to the man who did it."

"I want you to get rid of him."

"How can I?"

"There have been some freebooters' raids of late along the shore, so why cannot a party of men land there some night, attack his home and kill him?"

"They can; but it would be expensive, for I would have to go to Boston and get a craft and pick the men."

"Do it, cost what it may."

"All right, Captain Vail."

"Captain Spruel is not in this secret?"

"No, for he would object."

"And Mrs. Mountjoy?"

"She must not be harmed under any circumstances."

"And the children?"

"Bah! don't you understand that Mountjoy is the one to be doomed?"

"I'll see to it, sir, and leave by to-night's stage for Boston, for he will be in port ten days."

"Do so, and your share shall be a clear thousand," and the words made Justin Laws a happy man.

That night Justin Laws took passage in the midnight coach for Boston, in which there was but one other passenger.

That one was in the garb of a priest, and he took a seat by the side of the clerk.

"Well, you keep your word, Justin?"

"Yes, and lots of money it cost me, for I had to bribe three men in that prison."

"You owe it to an old friend to do so, for you are getting rich, Laws."

"I am a poor man."

"Not you; but your plot was a clever one, to go with a priest to see that sick man in the cell beyond mine, and have the guard you bribed open my cell and give me my robe as a padre."

"I walked out as cool as you please, and when it becomes known there will be a row, will there not?"

"There will be, but the priest is to stay all night with that dying prisoner, so you will not be missed until morning, and by then you will be safe."

"Oh, yes, and I thank you."

"Prove it by doing me a favor."

"Name it."

"I want a small craft and about half a dozen men."

"More devilry?"

"No, a kidnapping scrape."

"Ah! well, I'll get you the craft and the men, and a charming lot of cut-throats they will be."

"When do you want them?"

"Within a couple of days, and in disguise I will give them their instructions."

"All right, I'll get them for you and have you meet them on board."

"Then I shall go on a voyage, until my beard grows out and no one can recognize me, for I must be careful as an escaped convict, you know, Justin."

Without delay they arrived in Boston, and Justin Laws went to lodgings he was acquainted with, while Will Wilder sought his old rooms at the Good Cheer Inn, greatly to the delight of Mick, who gave him a warm welcome home.

Two days after Justin Laws received a note to go to a certain wharf where he would find a man waiting to take him on board a vessel off in the stream.

He went completely disguised himself and was soon in the dirty cabin of the craft, where he made his arrangements with the cut-throat-looking skipper to carry out a plot he had formed which would get rid of Mark Mountjoy effectually, and bring him in another round sum from the hand of his master, Ezra Vail, whose tool he was.

And while Justin Laws set out on his return to Salem to make his report, the wretched craft and her evil crew were beating along the coast to carry out the cruel plot they had been bribed well to undertake.

It was near midnight when the vessel sailed into Salem Harbor.

Her ragged sails were brown with age and stains, and without a light visible she could hardly be seen half a cable's length away.

She dropped anchor off-shore and within pistol-shot of Ivy Lodge.

Then a boat was noiselessly lowered and the murderous crew entered and were soon on shore creeping toward the home of their victim.

A knock at the door caused Mark Mountjoy to ask who was there and the answer came:

"Mate of the Winged Arrow, sir."

But Mountjoy did not know the voice and glancing out through a window saw the crowd of armed men.

"Be off, or I open fire!" he shouted.

There was a rush then, the door cracked under the weight hurled against it, and the young sailor seizing his pistols and cutlass stood at bay.

Then in came the door, pistol-shots rung out, groans and heavy falls followed, then came a wild shriek, and with cries of horror the midnight marauders fled.

And no wonder, for there on the floor lay three dead forms.

Two were those of the marauders; the third was Alma, the beautiful wife of Mountjoy.

A pistol-bullet had pierced her heart.

Wounded though he was, he forgot himself as he knelt by her side.

Then came hurrying feet, and a crowd of neighbors appeared.

Mark Mountjoy was cared for, and Major Deering sent after, and pursuit of the marauders was ordered, and the Winged Arrow put to sea with a crew from the Vidette on board.

But though the old vessel was found ashore, none of the vile crew were discovered, except one who lay dead on her decks, another victim of Mark Mountjoy's fury.

It was long weeks before Mark Mountjoy arose from a sick bed, and it was then to learn from the nurse of his children that one of them had died at the house in the country where she had taken them both after that night of horror.

The other was left in her charge, and the sorrowing father sold his schooner and cottage and bought half an interest in a fine brig bound for the whaling grounds.

To his surprise, when he went on board as captain, he found his partner in the ownership of the brig was none other than Will Wilder, who was also first mate of the vessel.

And so the good brig Sea Dove set sail to join the whaling fleet, and years went by ere she was again seen in the waters near Salem town.

In less than two months after her sailing, at her peak floated the black flag of the pirate—Mark Mountjoy was again under a cloud!

CHAPTER LV.

A FATAL PLEDGE.

WITH gloom in his heart at his life of sorrow, Mark Mountjoy hoped that his new career, far from the scenes of his earlier life and those who had known him then, would at least bring peace to his troubled soul.

Beautiful, noble Alma had been laid away in the pretty churchyard of Salem, and in the country, far from the grave of its dead mother, he was told was the grave of one of his little boys, while the other, too young almost to know his father, was under the care of the faithful nurse.

The brig, which bore the peaceful name of Sea Dove, was a fleet vessel, stanch and seaworthy.

In hiding himself, Will Wilder had gotten his mate to fit her out, and had then advertised to sell half a share in her.

This was the way in which Mark Mountjoy and Wilder had come to be partners, for the young sailor had offered to buy if he could be captain, and when he knew who was to be half-owner with him, Will Wilder gladly yielded the mast-r's berth, and took that of first mate.

The brig sailed the day after Mark and Wilder's arrival on board, and both were charmed with her, and Mountjoy was drawn toward his first officer, well knowing what he had done to serve him.

He had heard of Wilder's mysterious escape from prison, and knew that he was a confessed outlaw and a fugitive; but he would never betray him, for had he not in the past also been tempted, and but for his meeting with Alma Shields, he knew that he would have then been a freebooter.

The second mate, Juakin Estella, he did not like.

He was a thorough seaman, but he was a Spaniard, and had a cruel, treacherous look.

Before the brig had been two weeks at sea, the trouble began, for one night Mark Mountjoy found his crew fully armed, and coming into the cabin, Juakin Estella had all of them at his back.

"Captain Mountjoy, I wish to say to you and to Mate Wilder, that this craft is in my hands, for I shipped these men, and in the hold are guns for a fine battery, and ample small-arms and ammunition, for I fitted the vessel out to suit my own views."

"We like you, and if you care to serve as my officers, all right; if not, I shall put you both in irons and keep you there while I go on a buccaneering voyage among the vessels of the whaling fleet."

"What say you, seniors?"

Mark Mountjoy's answer was to spring at the Spaniard; but a dozen men threw themselves upon him, and after a fierce struggle he was overpowered and in irons; but Will Wilder accepted the terms offered him and remained as first officer, with Juakin Estella as captain.

And thus did the brig, with the peaceful name of Sea Dove, begin a piratical cruise, until she became a terror to the honest whalers.

One night, while lying in his state-room in irons, Mark Mountjoy heard wild shouts on deck, mingling with shots and the clash of arms.

He knew what it meant—Will Wilder had killed the Spanish captain and had proclaimed himself leader in his place, and the battle for mastery was going on with those of the crew who remained loyal to their former chief.

He arose from his berth, for he could not remain idle then, when Wilder might need his aid, and with a chair and exertions of his giant strength he drew the ring-bolts from the floor and was free at least to go on deck.

His left arm was manacled however, but his right was free, and seizing a cutlass from the cabin he sprung on deck into the midst of the struggling mass of humanity.

And not a moment too soon, for Wilder, his friend, who had accepted Estella's letters to save himself and Mountjoy, was being overpowered with his men.

But the good right arm of Mark Mountjoy turned the tide and victory was with Will Wilder and his followers.

And then once more Mark Mountjoy was placed in command of the brig, which was headed homeward with half her wicked crew in irons.

Yet still did adversity dog the path of Mountjoy for in a fearful storm the brig sprung a-leak and all were compelled to take to the boats.

In the same boat went Mountjoy and Wilder, and six of the men, and the ill-gotten treasure taken by Estella in his piracies was carried with them.

For days they drifted about, and one by one they died, until but the two officers and one of the two men remained alive, and it was Wilder's having hidden food and fed his friend the last seaman and himself by night that kept them from starvation.

One night in a blow the boat was driven ashore and the sailor, too weak to battle with the waves, went down in spite of the efforts of Mark to save him.

The treasure was saved however, and the two friends on the following morning found themselves alone the survivors and discovered that they were upon a desolate island not far from the mainland.

They buried their treasure, patched up their boat as best they could and reached the mainland.

They were kindly cared for at a farmhouse on the coast and learned just where they were.

After a few days they were once more themselves, and seated together one afternoon Will Wilder suddenly said:

"Mountjoy, I am going to tell you a secret."

"My name is not Wilder, but Wildermere Rutledge, and my father dwells not very far from where we now are."

"He is an old man, and an inhuman one, or rather he was in the long ago, for he caused my

mother's death by cruelty, and turned me out of doors, and thus it was that I went to the bad."

"Now the property he has was my mother's, and not his, and her will left me every dollar of it, though I have never claimed it, nor have I seen him since I left home twenty-five years ago."

"I heard he had married again, and was supposed never to have been married before; also that he is enormously rich, and this is all I know about him."

"Now I do not care to touch that treasure of Estella's, which we buried on the island, for fear it may bring us more bad luck; but we must start over again and we have nothing, so I wish you to go to my father and demand of him for me, ten thousand dollars."

"I will give you a letter to him, and tell him he can have all else, if he will give me that sum."

"Will you do this, Mark, for we can start anew with the world and carve out our fortunes in an honest way upon a fine vessel, which that money will secure for us."

"You will go, Mark?"

"Yes, I will go," was the response, and fateful were the words Mountjoy uttered.

CHAPTER LVI.

HIS DOOM.

MARK MOUNTJOY went upon his mission for Wildermere Rutledge, and reaching the town where the father of the rover dwelt was not long in discovering the gossip regarding him.

He lived in a rookery, and rumor had it treated his wife most shamefully.

Remembering all that Wildermere Rutledge had told him of him, how he had been the death of his mother, had driven him out of his home, and was living upon his son's fortune, Mark Mountjoy had only contempt for the old miser, and intended showing him no mercy, should he refuse the demand made upon him.

But a chapter in the early pages of this romance tells the tragic story of Mark Mountjoy's visit to old Peter Rutledge.

In self-defense, and aroused to fury, he had dealt a murderous blow, to be suddenly confronted by the one woman he had ever loved, the girl-sweetheart of his boyhood, the ladylove of his later years, and the one whom he had lost, who had been given for gold to old Miser Rutledge.

In dismay indescribable he had fled, going he knew not, cared not where, and yet he had the cunning of a madman to seek safety in flight.

Several days after he entered the town of Salem, and his steps led him toward Ivy Lodge, his old home.

Others dwelt there then, and it was no longer his home, and he turned away to find himself face to face with an angry crowd.

He had been recognized, and it had been told that he was the pirate who had played havoc with the whaling fleet.

He had gone out in the Sea Dove, and she had become a pirate vessel.

There were men in that crowd who had belonged to the whaling fleet when the Sea Dove was preying like a hawk upon the various vessels, and they had seen Mark Mountjoy upon the decks of the pirate, they had said.

Without investigation, without mercy, like human bloodhounds they set upon him, and the man whose life had been one of strange vicissitudes, and full of sorrow, was seized by the angry mob and dragged away to the woodlands on the hills.

Law, order were set aside, and mercy was smothered by hatred.

The one so long dogged was in their brutal power at last, when there was no chance to escape.

Up past The Harborage went the mass of humanity, unheeding the few weak voices raised to beg them to forbear, to give him a fair trial, and at last they reached the scene where death was to wipe out revenge, the death of their unfortunate, unhappy victim.

"Mark Mountjoy, murderer and sea robber, you have not ten minutes to live."

"Have you aught to say in that time?"

The speaker was a rough-faced sailor who had a debt to settle, or thought he had, against the unfortunate man, for one of the vessels burned by the Sea Dove he had been part owner of, and a broadside upon her from the buccaneer brig had killed his son.

He had constituted himself leader of the mob, and the others had acquiesced.

At other times brave, noble fellows, true seamen and Nature's noblemen, at sight of one whom they had been taught to believe guilty of law-breaking for years, and whom now they were sure had been proven a pirate, they had torn justice and judgment from their hearts and were ready to avenge their misfortunes by the death of the victim who had ventured among them.

Mark Mountjoy had not shrunk from the angry mass, nor had his eyes quailed.

He had offered no resistance that would only bring more indignity upon him, but had gone with them without a word.

Over him swept memories of the past, of his wild, reckless boyhood, which had gained for him the name of Mad Mountjoy.

He had been a creature of cruel circumstance, and when he had sought an honorable career, impassable barriers seemed to have risen before him.

He recalled his parents, his thoughts turned upon Lola, his life-long love, and who he little dreamed had been condemned by dying lips that meant not to condemn by words, but to say she could tell who her slayer was, and who then lay in a cell with the red crimson fastened upon her.

Lola, who would rather die on the gallows than betray him, Mark Mountjoy, the one man to whom her heart's love had ever gone forth.

Had he known this, then Mark Mountjoy would have in his frenzy fought single handed that mad crowd.

In his horror at slaying Peter Rutledge, he had not dared go back and face the son, though the son held no love for his father.

And so, half-dazed, he had drifted back to Salem, drifted back to what a fate.

In answer to the words of the ringleader of the mob, he said, in a voice that was without a tremor:

"I would have pen, ink and paper, and some man of honor here to pledge me he will obey my bidding."

A cottage home was near and a man hastened thither for the articles named, while a white-haired and bearded man, seemingly bent with age, tottered forward to the prisoner's side and said:

"I will do your bidding, my son."

"God bless you, old man!"

Then from the lips of the white-haired man came the whisper:

"Do not start, or it will betray me."

"I am Will Wilder."

There was no start, but the face paled and flushed, and Mark Mountjoy said sternly:

"You have me in your power, men, and are armed."

"Secure my feet, and if I attempt to escape, shoot me down; but fall back from me, for I would speak to this old man."

"Remember, I am about to step across the threshold of life, I have a confession to make—a man looking down into his own grave makes this request of you."

There was a movement in the crowd, and stern men set the example, and fell back in a wide circle.

The messenger arrived with the ink, pen and paper, and a plank was secured to write on, a log serving as a rest.

"God bless you, Wilder, but you do not know all," said Mountjoy.

"I do, for I have heard all, and was seeking you; he met his just fate," was the low response.

"I asked for writing materials to indite a few lines to you."

"I was going to ask you to see my boy, my poor little boy, to care for him, be a father to him, and in good time tell him all."

"To share with him, also, that treasure on the island, for I would have him beyond the curse of poverty."

"I will write here now, that I bequeath him to you, and that you hold the true secret of my life for him."

"I will write here now that I leave him my heir, and all I possess, even to my hatred for these bounds who seek my life."

"You will tell him all, Wilder, tell him as it is, so that all the shadows do not fall upon my unhappy memory."

"I mean it, Mountjoy—write, for this crowd grows impatient."

"Ah! that I had half a hundred good fellows here to cool their thirst for revenge with a little blood-letting," and Will Wilder gritted his teeth with rage.

And Mark Mountjoy, with a face that showed no fear, a hand that was firm as steel, wrote what he would say, his dying words, while the crowd glared at him, many admiring, but many more enraged that they could make him feel no fear.

Five, ten minutes passed away, and the work was ended, the name was signed, and the paper was placed in the hands of Will Wilder, who groaned in anguish as he signed it and grasped the hand of his friend.

From his quivering lips came the words:

"Good-by and God bless you, Mark Mountjoy."

"Farewell, and remember your trust."

Then, turning to the crowd who were pressing forward, his voice rung out as upon the quarter-deck:

"Men, I am ready!"

There was a wild yell, a rush, and in a few more minutes the end had come—Mark Mountjoy had met his doom.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

How strange their fate—Lola La Salle's and Mark Mountjoy's!

That he should die at the hands of a merciless mob, for crimes of which he was innocent, and that she, also innocent of the murder of her husband, unknowing his sad end, as she sat in her lonely cell, should be strangled by the law's iron arm!

She died leaving two orphan children that must know nothing of their mother's fate—died to shield the man she loved with all her heart and soul from the deed she had seen him commit!

He had died, willing his orphan child to the care of a loving man, though a law-breaker, a sea rover—an outlaw with honor.

Thus they passed from off the stage of life, and the seal of death was upon their lips.

And the children of the law-murdered mother were hurried away, that they might not know the dread secret of her fate.

And Will Wilder crept out of that mad crowd, unseen in the wild excitement, and sought safety in flight, for he must be true to his trust, true to his word to Mark Mountjoy.

True to it he was, until death came to him, years after, and the son of the doomed whaler had learned the secret, and the learning of it had planted seeds of hatred in his heart that would never die out.

Upon one, Herbert Deering, the memory of that mad man's act fell cruelly. Bitterly he denounced the human bloodhounds, and rejoiced at their conscience-stricken horror when the true story was told by several buccaneers who were captured by the Vidette and executed by order of Captain Spruel.

He spread the story of Mark Mountjoy's innocence, and many men of Salem hung low their heads with commingled shame and sorrow, for they had taken the life of a man for piracy, when he had been Estella's victim, on board his own ship, in irons.

The sad fate of Mountjoy fell with telling effect upon Fred Spruel, and remembering only his virtues, recalling how he had spared his life, the commander of the Vidette ever had a kind word for his memory, and, regretting his own part, carried in his heart a sorrow he could not banish, a memory that ever haunted him, even when, with age, honor and high rank were his.

It was upon The Harborage grounds that Mark Mountjoy had met his fate; but its mistress was not there then, or mayhap her presence would have stilled the raving mob.

She was away in Portsmouth, attending the marriage of her nephew, for he had won the heart of Grace Hunnewell, won it the day he saved her from the wreckers.

The bridal present of Miss Kittredge to the beautiful bride was The Harborage, whose charms lured the gallant soldier out of the army to settle down there as a gentleman of leisure, and while devoting his life to his own and his wife's happiness, he never forgot the happiness of others—never forgot the man whom he had loved as a brother, and over whose body, placed by the side of poor Alma, in a secluded retreat of The Harborage woodlands, he erected a fitting tomb.

As for two other characters of my romance, Ezra Vail and Justin Laws, the former grew richer and richer, and kept his vow to make his son the wealthiest heir in New England.

If remorse ever came to him for his persecution of Mad Mark Mountjoy, he never showed it, but reared his son to have his hatreds and revengeful nature.

But Justin Laws did feel the death his plot brought upon poor Alma, and he became a changed man, silent and subdued, and to even the advances of Widow Betts made no resistance but was quietly roped into her toils, and in what she made him suffer there would have been revenge for Mark Mountjoy had he lived.

In a pretty cottage, as though tired of longer being a rover of the seas, Will Wilder, as he still called himself, made his home. It was a picturesque, secluded spot upon the coast of Maine, and in fierce storms the spray would dash upon the piazza of the little home.

A comfortable, cozy abiding-place, with boats, horses, dogs and books with which to while away the time, Will Wilder seemed at least contented, and devoted himself to the care of Mark Mountjoy's son, to whom he had become as a father.

And thus falls the curtain on the scenes of the long ago in Salem town.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
98 William Street, New York.